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Travel Literature. Mircea Eliade's Occidental View in the *Himalayan Journal* and the *Portugal Journal*

Abstract: This article retraces Mircea Eliade's mystical travel through the Himalayas as shown in his *Himalayan Journal* and his struggle to survive as a writer under the weight of brutal historical events in his *Portugal Journal*. The two travel journals reveal the influence of geographical and historical elements on Eliade's mystical writing. A deeper analysis of these journals is necessary to link travel genre to mystical thought. The next pages will show (1) how these journals fit into the category of existential travel, as theorized by Erik Cohen in "The Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences" (179-201), (2) Eliade's own transcendence of his identity in two key moments of his creative path, and (3) that the latter creative crisis in Portugal is also the time when Eliade embarked on a transcendence towards the history of the religious thought, his most important philosophical and literary contribution. His accomplishments in the history of philosophy in the 1930s, his contribution to the aesthetics of myth, and his fantastic short stories, inspired him to travel to the ends of the world at the bottom of Himalayas to seek out Eastern philosophies and yogis engaged like him in the same quest for the absolute. By doing so, Eliade pioneered the genre of travel literature even before travel became a literary theme.

Keywords: travel, existentialism, mysticism

The Mystical Travel in the Himalayas

In today's literature, the increasing number of travel writings from major publishing houses, alongside online works such as podcasts, blogs, or travel vlogs, demonstrate an extraordinary public interest in travel. Added to this is the current impact of travel literature on education and the popularity that reading has gained (Groom, *Methods of Teaching…* - 2005). This can be partially explained by the interest in experiencing vicariously through travel writing, or simply by the public's exploratory curiosity about what travel can reveal about the world or the traveler's inner world. Following some of the theories on travel literature, Erik Cohen (179-201) identified in "The Phenomenology of Touristic Experiences" (1979) five modes of this genre: entertaining and diversifying, for travelers seeking escape from everyday existence; experiential, experimental, and existential, for those undergoing a spiritual journey with a major impact on their identity. This study aims to demonstrate that the primary reason behind Eliade's travels successfully fulfills the latter mode, that of existential exploration through the colonial eyes of a westerner.

Like contemporary writers today, Mircea Eliade had too experienced this genre after gaining fame in fiction writing and philosophy, even before travel became popular as a theme in non-fiction writing. Eliade's early accomplishments in the history of philosophy in the 1930s, his decisive contribution to the aesthetics of myth, and his fantastical writings inspired him to experiment with the mystical in the East. Thus, was born his project to travel to the opposite part of the earth to seek similar intellectual interests among the philosophers of the Indies and the yogis who were engaged in the same pursuit of the absolute.

It was after his experiments with the sacred in the Himalayas that his fictional and philosophical writings on religion surpassed the national borders of France or Romania, gaining global recognition. Thus, the lesser-known part of his work, travel writing, which takes the form of journals, reveals the writer at work and the birth of his philosophical ideas. The *Himalayan Journal* [*Journal Himalayen et autres*

voyages—French edition—2013][1] and the *Portugal Journal* [*Jurnal portughez*—Romanian edition—2010][2] capture attention because they reveal Eliade in two decisive moments in his creative destiny, uncovering the function of religion for the humankind and revealing the influence of historical elements on his writing.

After all, his initial interest in the boundaries between the profane and the sacred had led his investigations to the origins of Eastern philosophy and the bungalows at the foot of the Himalayas, laying the groundwork for his travel literature as proof to the intellectual and spiritual superiority of the East over the West civilizations. It is in these travel journals that Eliade discovers, through calculated and scientifically solid observation, ethnographic and anthropological details of the human nature, attire, and space. Eliade's journal in India, often less popular and frequently overlooked by his Romanian, French and American biographers, has the potential to reveal essential elements that contributed to his deep understanding of other nonhegemonic cultures and the role of religion within those cultures, as well as the evolution of his style and the brilliance of his fictional writing.[3]

In Eliade's comparative vision of the worlds and cultures he traversed, he laid the foundation for understanding the esoteric through a phenomenological approach, with key concepts such as *hierophany*, *the sacred* and *the profane*, as well described by his most influential critic, Douglas Allen (in *Structure and Creativity in Religion*, 1972) as noted by Mary Barbara Agnew in her review to Douglas Allen's book in 1978. A brief overview of the *Journal Himalayen* and the *Jurnal portughez* follows Eliade in a transmutation from fiction to philosophical writing, through a journey of mystical geography and the beginning of what will become his later religious studies. Allen finds Eliade's method singular among religious historians of the twentieth century because Eliade identified religious phenomena from other fields of human expression and creativity with the help of these two main concepts: *the sacred* and *the profane*, specifically by identifying the symbols of the sacred materialized in and through the profane, and by the magical function of *hierophanies*. As often noticed by younger religious historians, Allen would find Eliade's method incomplete because Eliade is not analyzing these symbols by discerning between their receivers as *homo religious* or simply as people guided by their human condition aspects. The truth of this detail of Eliade's method resides exactly in his deep understanding of the world as a cumulus of knowledge, oneness, with multiple dimensions. Eliade simply did not define the differences between *homo religious* and *l'homme du monde*. But he did find humans sliding from one mystical experience to the quotidian life, back and forth. They remain the same, the worlds they travel through are different.[4]

Even from his early steps on the Asian continent, his travel literature transcends the genre's boundaries and systematically addresses the search into the essence of orientalism. The genre of travel literature itself stems from an eighteenth-century tradition of travel as the primary means to explore life and geography and to further educate, in agreement with John Locke's empiricism and importance of sense in knowledge.

The notes on India that laid the foundation for the journal were taken from 1928 to 1931 by Eliade, still very young and in a desperate state of mind. After an intense love story (beautifully recounted in his novel *Bengal Nights: Maitreyi*–1st edition 1933) and a profound initiation in Indian poetry and philosophy through Maitreyi, the daughter of his guru Dasgupta, he is chased away by his host family and arrives in

[1] The French title would be used from now on.

[2] The Romanian title will used from now on

[3] "Cultural, political, and literary critics now share a theoretical language with cartographers and geographers: their discourse revolves around concepts of space and territory, notions of inside and outside, center and margin" (Russell 2).

[4] See, for example, "Part Two: Eliade's Phenomenology: Key Methodological Notions," and "Part Three: Eliade's Phenomenology and New Directions: Some Methodological Issues and Conclusions" (*Structure and Creativity in Religion: Hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade's Phenomenology and New* Directions - Douglass Allen, 1978).

Himalaya. Although the initial notes, and the subsequent journal from this point on, do not mention his heartbreaking split with Maitreyi, they retrace his mystical initiation into orientalism back to this era when he fell in love with an oriental poetess and disengaged with his identity as a scholar of western philosophy. It is no coincidence that Eliade sought refuge in travel writing as a means of objective knowledge and anthropological discovery of the places and the mystical experiences of those he encountered, by a continuous disassociation with his immediate conditions of existence.

From the outset, one recognizes the concern for the emotional Gidian authenticity of his lived experience through the Orient, which was not necessarily the objective reality of his travel. Eliade (*Journal Himalayen*… 2013) claims to have composed this journal based on memories from his notes: "I preferred to retain the fragmentary, spontaneous character of the pages written about certain parts of unknown India, avoiding as far as possible the personal element" (7) (translation mine).[5] Up to that point, Eliade aligns with the long tradition of the genre and views his journal notes as a working document to visually capture the details of the visited locations. Like nineteenth-century travelers, amazed by their time and the discovery of the train that made travel accessible, Eliade delighted in this immense opportunity to travel and discovered places and people outside his Italian and French Western cultural sphere. He ignored the differences between his mystical experience as a traveler with the people and places he discovered on his journey, and the writing of the journal many years later, as a reflection upon this first experience. On the contrary, for Eliade it seems as if the act of writing, of telling a story, goes naturally hand in hand with discovering other people's culture and completing the experience of the sacred. The mystical and the experiential dimensions of his travels are naturally embedded into his writing in an atemporal continuum of the spaces seen.

The geographical detail becomes the only way of keeping a track with Eliade's way in this travelogue notes, as the writer delves into them hoping to recollect parts of the local mysticism as well as of his own. By sharing his discoveries of parts still unknown to western academics—the Thar Desert, Kashmirut, the Afghan border, and Burma—Eliade immerses himself by train or on foot, recounting details like the temperature, or the freshness of Siliguri. This shows us that while still unaware of the aesthetics of his writing style as a traveler, Eliade was aware that travel writing could shape and transforms western perception of the places he visited and even mark considerably westerners' identity and assurance as holders of religious knowledge. In Siliguri, he finds himself inundated by scorpions at night, which shows him the exoticism of the places he is traversing. As stated in the preface of the journal, there is even a concern from his part to conserve in his ethnological and geographical descriptions certain parts of the journey that were not even mentioned in his travel notes: "I therefore ask the reader to use their imagination to fill in the gaps in this itinerary" (7). In this regard, as sharply observed by some of his critics later, Eliade was aware of the power of literature to influence societal views as well as religious thought.[6] Religious or just literary, the story shared is a connection, a link that resonates to a couple of individuals, met along his travels, or across time through readings of older texts on a specific mystical aspect of human existence. The sacred vibe of existence is recorded and transmitted through the generations as myths, rituals, symbols. Eliade's initiation into identifying the sacred comes from studying the mystical rituals of the yogis, which opened his eyes on the power of the story sharing as a loci for mystical values as well as cultural identity.

As opposed to Mary Barbara Agnew and Douglas Allen, who critiqued Eliade's study of religious thought in detail and noticed Eliade's observations on his own mystical initiation in his later works on

[5] All translations from Mircea Eliade's works are mine.

[6] Mary Barbara Agnew and Douglas Allen are among the keen observers of Eliade's influence on the study of religious thought in western society.

shamanism, our views on his *Journal Himalayen* follow a very young Eliade in the midst of his initiation and seek in this journal the seeds of his later theories on religious thought and the religious humankind.

We discover an Eliade who surpasses the documentary concern of nineteenth and twentieth-century travel literature. He views himself from the margin when encountering places and people, conscious of his outsider position, which allowed him to record facts and to learn about the sacred customs like a novice, an uninitiated mystic. There is, thus, a dual approach that underpins his travel writing in India: the exploration of the unknown and the exotic other, and still a familiar connection with the epiphanies of local rituals to reveal the sacred.

The exoticism of the nature and the places surprises him at every step, such as the unwritten local custom of demanding money without offering a service and yet without begging. Details of daily life seem curious and enticing to him: the pleasure of giving and the inherent generosity of the act itself. In direct contact with local rituals, performances, songs, and stories told, Eliade undertakes a systematic exploration of something he had already grasped at Calcutta with the help of his mentor Dasgupta and his love for mystical poetry to which he was initiated by Maitreyi, at the time a young but already published poet writing in the style of Tagore. It is through their common readings that Eliade discovers an unexpected spiritual connection between mystical thought and Indian poetry which seemed natural to the young Indian poetess. This identification of the poet as a shaman, as a healer for the community and a spiritual guide, is common in the Indian poetical tradition:

> In 1964, Mircea Eliade published *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, a work that brought into academic focus the figure of the shaman as a healing spirit, a medium between this world and the other. Many poetic theories have since looked at the figure of the shaman as being similar to the figure of the poet, and have identified patterns of similarities in their roles and powers of communicating with the unseen. (Subba and Chaturvedi 5)

The same approach of the literary creativity coming from the realm of the mystical is often found in Eliade's fantastic literature, where the poet, much like the shamans, can embark on a mystical travel of the spirit, gliding from one dimension of a dream like nature to the 3D reality, as described in *La ţigănci* [*With the Gypsy Girls*][7] or even in the *Bengal Nights*. Mircea Eliade identifies shamanism as an "archaic technique of ecstasy" (Ivănescu and Berentzen 2), and defines the shaman as "a psychopomp, and he may also be a priest, mystic, and poet" who both cures and performs miracles (*Shamanism* 4). According to Eliade, the shaman is beyond space and time. He lives in the mythical dimension, which enables the envisioning of continuous cycles of death and rebirth. He crosses and travels at will between different realms of existence, and communicates directly with spirits, animals and plants. Through ecstasy, which according to him is the foremost 'technique' of shamanism, the shaman enters and leaves this primordial and universal state of being human, being permeated by the 'mysteries' of nature at will.

In certain regions of India, the English influence is strongly felt. It is especially here, in colonized India, encountering several cultures, that Eliade, originally Romanian, presents himself as French and feels his religious beliefs as extremely occidental, by comparison to the Indian local traditions. At Darjeeling, the summer residence of the Governor of India, he observes the appearance of a true apparatus of social and cultural dominance through symbols of colonial culture: cinema, tennis, dancing, hotels, whereas in other regions, the lack of these signs is a source of national pride. Still, he finds the role that Indians from different regions were giving to the shaman and to the poet still interchangeable between cultures through the simple common element of the bliss that both would find in ecstatic experiences. Thus, the

[7] "La ţigănci" is the name given by Mircea Eliade to his fantastic novel written in Paris in 1959 and published in Romania in 1963. The novel was translated in English, in 1981, as "With the Gypsy Girls," by William Ames Coates.

geographical travel is paralleled by his exploration of this mystical journey in different cultures and in different traditions within the same Indian culture.

The transition from one region to another also marks colonial frontiers. Today, we know the immense influence that advancements in various means of transportation, technology, or perceptions of travel can have on literature in general and on the travel literature in particular. Postmodern theories such as Lyotard's, Derrida's, Lacan's, or Jameson's[8] views on writing have contributed to demythologizing the central place that literature occupied in defining culture, to better distinguish between the work of ethnographers and that of traveling writers. This is a distinction that Eliade proposes from the beginning of his *Journal Himalayen*, which did not yet have a theoretical foundation in the 1930s.

Furthermore, his travel narrative touches some tourist spots like Mount Everest, which at that time was a highly publicized location and was losing its mystical value due to scientific popularization. Eliade himself is popularizing Indian spirituality as he tries to integrate it within scientific parameters. Clearly dedicated to the scientific exploration of Indian mysticism, the journal hints at his appreciation for natural beauty behind these observations of art history and religions. Writing is Eliade's second nature, hidden behind the scientist because his soul cannot resist the poetry of nature, sensitive to a sunrise in the Himalayas, the snow-capped peaks of mountains, and their supernatural silence. Here is an image where the scientist and the writer come together, where he has a premonition of what will later develop in his studies on religion: the center and the sacred in the tradition of cosmological images (12-17). According to his later theories on the religious human being, Eliade was not on a tourist route, as he was seeking a reference point with a spiritual center. As opposed to his mystical journey, tourists attempt to stray from any center of their community, religious or cultural, or any other value, according to Cohen's classification (181).

Funeral rites in Lebong give him the opportunity to observe the religious rituals of the country: "This monastery, like all those in Tibet, did not observe pure Buddhism, as practiced in Ceylon or Japan. It was more of Lamaism, a frightening mixture of Mahayana Buddhism, Tibetan demonism, and Mongol influences" (31). Primarily, it is the drumming during Tibetan funerals that catches his attention. He discovers the transition of the spirit from one world of the living to another dimension as a ritual of initiation. The spirit of the deceased seems to merge into the unknown, resonating with the frequencies and the rhythms of these litanies, which are nothing, but a staccato reading of a Tibetan manuscript accompanied by drums, flutes, trumpets, and gongs. In this mystical musical resonance, words dissolve into consonant groups interspersed with vowel choirs. Apart from the drums which accompany the soul through their rhythmical resonances, the rest of the ritual is dedicated to the living.

This ceremony also gives Eliade the opportunity to compare funerals here with those in Calcutta, where everything seemed soft, peaceful, and silent. These are undoubtedly different paradigms of the same understanding of the unknown that awaits the soul after death.

Regarding the act of writing a non-fictional text, it seems to give Eliade free rein for improvisation and total stylistic freedom as he no longer feels constrained by genre rules. Sometimes, the thread of the journey guides his train of thought, leaving entire paragraphs incomplete or fragmented. The fact that this journal was written based on scattered travel notes is felt repeatedly because the journal is a fusion of ethnographic research and geographic detail. On this background of scientific method, the

[8] Alison Russell attributes the foundation of a postmodern theory of travel literature to these theorists, philosophers who have questioned the traditional definition of culture and the decentralization of the human subject. Thus, travel writing can embrace ethnographic observations just as ethnography can aspire to literary qualities: "In other words, while these travel narratives offer the readerly interests of conventional travel literature, reformulated through an awareness of the problematics of representing culture and space in a postmodern world, their ultimate value lies in their exposure and critique of our uses and abuses of planetary resources and global space" (15).

autobiographical element is present despite Eliade's promise to ignore it,[9] as in the episode of Zok-Chen-Pa. These places awaken through their beauty feelings of nostalgia for the lost love of Maitreyi. At the Mahayana pantheon of Zok-Chen-Pa, he overcomes immense sadness through the contemplation of the present and the ignorance of the past, as if he were leaving his past and his old identity behind.

In the Himalayas, he visits convents and hermits to gather rituals and observe their beliefs. It is here that he discovers a paradise that can heal the soul, a true center where individuals find themselves and rediscover their values. Later, in a 1969 study,[10] Eliade will develop a theory of mythical imagination and its power to locate the center in a paradisiacal outside that is not temporal nor physical, far from everything familiar to us. Moreover, his Indian travel companions mistake him for a missionary because of his genuine interest in their lives and sacred values: "Missionaries are indeed the only Europeans who travel third class, who are interested in Indians, their traditions and philosophy, who become familiar with them, and of course try to convert them at all costs" (54). In contrast to modern trends in travel writing and modern tourism focusing on the social life of people and local cultures, Eliade's writing delves deeper by attempting to discover in modern Indian cultures ancient traces of traditional cosmology, their true image of the sacred. According to Cohen's classification of tourist experiences, Eliade could very well fall into the category of those who experiment with the spiritual centers of other societies.[11]

Beyond religious rituals, he records local customs such as breathing protocols or diet as rites of spiritual initiation: boiled rice without salt and a few vegetables. Thus, the vegetarian diet maintained for decades in direct connection with Hatha Yoga provides a certain freshness to tissues, elasticity to bones, and prolongs life. The scientific work does not stop here because a long tradition of alternative medicine reveals itself as surprisingly efficient. Like a true botanist, Eliade notes the consumption of certain roots for detoxification and the mental energy emanated. His strategy of exclusively following the path of objective research proves very fertile as the few recipes of Ayurvedic medicine put him on the path of philosophical investigation into Eastern mysticism and already provide the beginnings of a theory that will later develop into his views on shamanism. Clumps of cannabis are a good preparation for meditation when their leaves are boiled or smoked; other bulbs called "fruits of the rishi" are consumed as a tonic by hermits; the nervous system is well strengthened by the leaves of Brahma, which even have a medicinal taste. Some of these remedies are very potent because the juice of a shrub can cure scorpion stings, or a certain cannabis plant has the same narcotic strength as opium (65).

Meditation, a habit already experienced by Eliade, proves to be a rich subject of research when he encounters at the foot of the Himalayas an Occidental *homme de science* transformed into a shaman and observes the way the mystics here perceive this spiritual habit as a way of being rather than a momentary state of mind, as practiced in Europe. Sick for two years with rheumatism and malaria, his subject testifies how he had been cured through a combination of yoga and meditation. This experience took this westerner turned shaman beyond the limited pain, death, and separation because he integrated into the sole reality of Brahman-Atman. Eliade recognizes here the Upanishadic motif and continues his research by turning his notes into a primary source of investigation and the starting point for a new project, which is his travel writing. Taking the form of a journal, this new writing experience is perceived by Eliade as a genre invested primarily in the authenticity of life as perceived by the people he met.

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[9] Few writers follow this line of non-fiction literature that renders the description of travel without the author's personal voice, a more modern trend as seen in Dervala Murphy's *Eight Feet in the Andes.* Eliade is noting this on purpose to avoid confusing his travel writing to "the pilgrimage of modern man" (Cohen 179).

[10] Eliade, Mircea. *The Quest; History and Meaning in Religion*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969.

[11] "*Experimental Mode*: this mode of the touristic experience is characteristic of people who do not adhere any more to the spiritual center of their own society but engage in a quest for an alternative in many different directions" (Cohen 189).

In this *Journal Himalayen*, Eliade cultivates his inner life not in the traditional form of introspection akin to Gide or Proust, but as an introspect journey traversed between the inside and outside, a dynamic experienced in the Eastern fashion of the mystics here. He begins to identify in the Himalayas the steps for a meditation protocol to draw the spirit closer to the sacred. In a hermitage along the Ganges, Eliade immerses himself in this mystical experiment and is struck by the values of tolerance (beyond concerns of religion, nationality, or money) that he learns from Brahmanism. The experience of the life and the customs of the hermits is surprising in its minimal demands: respecting the wearing of a yellow or white robe, sandals, and a vegetarian diet. However, this attitude of tolerance recalls the intolerance of the West, where spirituality manifests in exclusive religious beliefs and incessant attempts to convert others. Like many travel writers, Eliade discovers with surprise the maturity of the Eastern thinker, more interested in the individuals who arrive, more curious about the intellectual life of travelers, philosophical questions, or societal issues in worlds less familiar to them, unlike the Western philosopher for whom the conditions of religious or social beliefs[12] in the East do not hold any authority.

Thus, he engages in universal conversations with people who read and meditate on Brahma, God, the Immanent, the transcendent, and discusses all the books of humanity: the *Bhagavad-Gita* [Hindu Scripture—1st or 2nd century BCE], the *Upanishads* (1st millennium BCE—1400 CE), *The Imitation of Christ* [*De Imitatione Christi*—Thomas à Kempis—1418-1427], the *Brahma-Sutras* (200 BCE—450 CE), the *Yoga-Sutras* (1st century CE**)**. Jesus is seen as equal to Buddha and Krishna, and intellectual and spiritual curiosity leads Brahmins to take an interest in Christianity and the history of European countries far from their own world. Eliade feels a genuine sense of calm because tolerance here joins hands with erudition and spirituality, whereas any travelers would have highlighted the dangers of traveling in a world with strict cultural codes and unstable customs. However influencing the Indian religious thought for his later writings on the topic, it looks like Eliade will come to appreciate and reveal his inspiration from it, but with a couple of differences:

> According to Eliade, the phenomenon through which the Holy manifests itself is not Holy. It remains in its essence profane. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, as an example, is regarded as a supreme expression of the manifestation of the Holy (God) through the otherwise profane (Jesus/Man). Through an example derived from the vaisnava-tradition of Hinduism, it is shown however, that things or phenomenons [sic] in themselves can be Holy. (Jensen and Rothstein np)

As a foreigner among people who seldom encounter western scientists, Eliade receives a special status and a certain respect from the Indians because he serves as a source of information and education about Western civilizations in return. He also enjoys the luxury of traveling at ease, observing the world by connecting his abstract ideas to the concrete aspects of daily life (Groom 9). It is an intellectual achievement that he realizes once immersed in geography, in complete harmony with nature, a lesson learned amidst yogis, a delicate process of spiritual integration into the world of immediate existence. This is how his journal becomes a true work of travel from the physical world to introspection, as he feels he is traveling to the ends of the earth, in a space that defines for him the very essence of spiritual exoticism in the unknown. The act of recording the journey as a transcendental experience meets the criteria of scientific writing as well as the simple emotional notation of a personal journal (Groom 15). India reveals itself to him once again as a space of paradoxes and surprises because he moves through it with extraordinary attention and concern, noting even the slightest religious or philosophical speculations.

[12] For Eliade, the aim is to search behind traditions and rituals for authentic spiritual values, with authenticity being the key word to fulfill the requirement of travel as a true transformative experience: "the quest of meaning and authenticity, characteristic of the sphere of religion" (Cohen 193).

In another region, he becomes a witness to a civil revolution during the political engagement of students and professors at Garukul College, a renowned nationalist hub, revealing invisible links created between religion or political engagement and dissent. It is also one of the occasions where Eliade deviates from his plans of ethnographic observation as his notes turn into a mix of memory, journal, historical observations, and cartography, an interdisciplinary composition that serves as geopolitical instruction on a lesser-known region. The travel writing here emerges as an educational tool to sensitize westerners to encounters with other cultures, to awaken them to the aesthetic spirit of beauty elsewhere, opening horizons to geopolitical conditions and lesser-known authors in France or elsewhere in the West (Groom 16).

Further on, the Afghanistan border is dangerous for foreigners: "Ever since I had descended from the Himalayas in the company of Arthur Young (the sadhu with the black cobra who took the hermit named Swami Janananda and wore the monastic robe), I found myself under constant police surveillance" (Eliade 91). Once again, his status as a foreigner burdens his travel experience and limits the possibilities of exploration as he perceives it as a territory where he loses his freedom of movement. The greatest peril he faces with his travel partners is the risk of being kidnapped for exorbitant ransoms. In the absence of security, Eliade begins to note details he would never have suspected, like the danger of showing weapons in the bazaar, a direct offense to the Afghans. Here, he also observes shocking customs such as shooting for entertainment. A concept akin to Eliade's reality here is that of a contact zone where two different cultures meet, one dominant and the other subordinate (Groom 16). It is at this moment that Eliade reverses roles and feels he belongs to a subordinate western culture, minoritarian and less potent in Asia.

In Santiniketan, he converses with an Indian nationalist and is even more shocked by the image of mounted police aggressively dispersing protesters in the streets. In stark contrast to the tranquil Himalayas, British India leaves him with the impression of a nightmare, although Eliade's style has never had the occasion nor the inclination for the nightmarish or horrific descriptions: "Skulls cracked and limbs broken are everywhere. But it is only in British India that one sees children trampled by horses, crushed by hooves, bloodied by batons" (130).

Eliade the traveler sees himself as an explorer of a hidden meaning in the spiritual and intellectual customs of people met. He surprises himself in this role and realizes the intellectual potential for his philosophical writings and the unexpected potential hidden within the genre of travel writing itself. The journal often transforms into a meta-narrative on the clarity he has about what he will write in parallel with the reflections on territories he travels through.

At the University of Santiniketan, renowned for its vibrant intellectual life, he meets well-prepared science students, a highly respected modern journal *Visvabharati Quarterly*, an extensive collection of works by Rabindranath Tagore, and many scientific monographs. He encounters European scholars familiar with the area as well as the most renowned orientalists of the time. Closer to his individual experience, he immerses himself in a rich atmosphere of work, initiative, and reform, both within the college and its surroundings. In the same district, he observes the local people practicing agriculture in self-sufficient farms, following Tagore's model. Thus, poetry blends with more functional skills such as agricultural work, as well as medicine. Eliade observes here through the eyes of a foreigner an unattainable link between poetry, philosophy, and everyday life, and he better understands why Tagore believed poetry to combat malaria.

Eliade also notes here how Tagore had reinforced the folkloric tone of the Holi festival with dance and games among the students, creating an atmosphere of physical and spiritual bliss. It is here too that Eliade learns of a potential danger in his ethnographic observations, particularly the peril of ethnocentrism and the superior attitude of the outsider making observations. An interesting discussion arises through the teachings of Srimati Devi on stereotypes about Eastern women and Indian women in particular:

"Picturesque and plausible, they were created because they flattered either our imagination or our prejudices as civilized Westerners" (119). Other travels take him to see the connection between poetry and the nature as at Ceylon with its warm, faded sea and deserted beaches.

Thanks to the transcendental power of geographical exploration, the transition between multiple cultures is more peaceful. The imposing aspect of the intricate temple architecture amidst nature once again shows the normal cohabitation of people and landscapes. The Ramashwaram temple is a gigantic vision, with a considerable expanse and even more impressive architecture featuring hundreds of corners, inner courtyards, and colonnades supported by elephants in bizarre poses. It is in the unified image of this monument of fragmentary construction that Eliade imagines the idea of a labyrinth, which he later coins as a central symbol for the sacred camouflaged in the profane. The statues are monuments of civilized endurance in time, although invaded by nature, squirrels and lizards.

December 1928 finds Eliade in Madras, where he discovers the charm of South Indian nights, the contemplation of the sky leading to mystical experiences in the unique company of the night:

> The night of South India is not the night of Romania, it is not the night of the mountains, it is not the night of Italy. Between it and these lies Arabia. Here, the contemplation of the sky inevitably induces strange questions and musings. [...] That is why the poets and thinkers of India seem so unique to us—they have remained too long alone with themselves. (61)

Falling ill, Eliade describes this experience of cholera associated with smallpox and malaria, felt as a decomposing and recompositing of consciousness. At Benares, a colonized Indian city, culture combines with nature as the sun lingers among palaces and gardens. This leitmotif of nature gently merges with the culture of the places visited. In Amritsar, in the north, near the Himalayas, the city of the Golden Temple integrates perfectly the eucalyptus forests reflected in the sky and swept by the twilight wind. Like everywhere in India, the temple is the beginning of philosophy, open to everyone, where gurus are read amid festivities, flowers, and aromatics.

In existentialist travel writing often the folklore of customs (Groom 39) harmoniously combines with spiritual beliefs. For Eliade this is revealing an inner inclination towards ceremonial and celebrations. Moreover, he is interested in the impact of customs and folklore on the people he finds on his way. Interested predominantly in the folklore of oral traditions up to that point, Eliade discovers in ethnographic observation new capabilities. Jaipur reveals itself to him as an exotic city, entirely built in red stone with Rajput-style battlements, under sunny streets. It is a free state, with its own maharajah, that values highly its freedom, having never experienced English occupation. The style of dress here is different from the rest of India, with women of oblong profile wearing black silver rings and enormous earrings.

Here he might have drawn comparisons between a local dance and what he had seen before to the Romanian Roma, since the description of the dance he watches at Jaipor is found later in the seductive dance performed by the three mystical characters from his already mentioned 1959 fantastic novel “La Ţigănci” [“With the Gypsy Girls”]. The orchestra composed of violins and veena remains behind a curtain while the dancers in expensive costumes of silk and gold, adorned with pearls and diamonds, clap their hands and dance on tiptoes. In a luxurious interior, spectators are offered cigarettes and drinks, much like in his Romanian novel.

In Rajputana, in the jungle near Sahibgange, the journal includes excerpts from a crocodile hunt. The sense of adventure is not innate, a lack that can be observed among Eliade's literary characters, more concerned with existential crises than exotic adventures.

Eliade's Existential Crisis in Portugal

By comparison, *Jurnal portughez* presents a more pessimistic voice than the hopeful and curious young Eliade of the Himalayas. The inevitability of his failure as a writer and as a philosopher of the religious thought who cannot materialize his projects during Second World War overwhelms him. According to Sorin Alexandrescu in his Preface to Eliade's journal, the despair and futility of his work are at the center of his attention (34). This deep feeling of personal drama brings him closer to illustrious names such as Marcel Proust, who wrote the masterpiece of his life in a continuous sense of helplessness, or André Gide, by the nature of his writing style deeply intertwined to the way he experienced life.[13] In this regard, Eliade kept his novelistic style in his travel journal writing.

Curiously, this time of creative crisis is also the time when Eliade embarks on a transcendence towards an unexpected future: he makes the first steps from fiction to nonfiction and from Romania to France and the United States, which he will later theorize as the interdependence between necessary death and the life that is in solidarity with it. As his intellectual drama unfolds, an older Eliade reveals to his admirers, quite different from the writer of the *Bengal Nights: Maitreyi* (1933). While his young years are spent into a sweet conviction of his genius and as an enthusiastic investigator of religious beliefs in India, the later Eliade looks much older than his age, as succumbing to the heavy load of the impossible historical and literary moment.

Torn between the fear of failing all his planed fiction or philosophical writings, and the fateful certainty of his genius still unloaded, Eliade leaves Romania behind in 1940 and with it he gives up all hope for a brilliant future in his country. Under the wave of the war, he feels writing differently, as personal survival, hence the need to find himself intellectually in the writing of a journal. In Lisbon, Eliade is not alone, but he is lonely, without valuable writers or cultured men around him. After losing his manuscripts at Oxford, amid the biggest political crisis in the European history, he tries desperately to find similar intellects to challenge him. On several occasions, he manages to contact his friends in Romania through his wife Nina, who was often back to Romania for medical reasons. But Nina's illness and even his own psychological troubles of a rather neurasthenic nature, with bouts of nervous depression, plunge him deeper into despair. Not surprisingly, *Jurnal portughez* is often consulted by Eliade's reader to dig into his secret to overpass the load of history and create something new, worthy of his prized name.

> I am not suggesting that the context in which Eliade began to write *The Myth of the Eternal Return* can explain the meaning of the book. What I am suggesting is that in this case, as in many others, personal and public elements, as well as subjective drives and objective constraints, interacted—and sometimes reinforced each other. (Ginzburg 313)

Once he finally retrieves his documents from London, including a few pages of a journal and the manuscript of a novel tentatively titled *The New Life*, Eliade starts to bounce back and feels that his destiny as a writer is his only salvation. He feels again stronger and finds the resources to start working on *Introduction to the History of Religions*, which is about to become his most important scientific compendium. In a world disrupted by the war, he struggles to resurface the futility of all intellectual gestures.

[13] Well noticed by most of Eliade's first Romanian analysists, such as George Călinescu, who were looking at his style as a novelist, and found a deep resemblance to André Gide's writing as reflective of the interior experience and the creative consciousness: "André Gide nu urmărește să creeze tipuri, menirea artei fiind de a reflecta experiențele interioare ale artistului, iar împlinirea acestui ideal presupune abolirea graniței dintre bine și rău…" [André Gide does not aim to create literary types, the aim of the work is to mirror the artist's deep experiences, and doing that means to abolish the limits between good and bad] (Bănică 4). (translation mine)

In the prime of his life, Eliade sees himself aged and reflects wisely on his unexplored intellectual capacity, overwhelmed by a fervent sense of nationalism: "I can do nothing since Romania entered the war. I cannot write. I have abandoned the novel once again" (44). His reflections on politics and Romania's historical destiny mirror into his characters, like the very dark agent Pamfil Şeicaru, a sort of chameleonic species who survives every political regime. This prototype of a political opportunist is the nemesis of the modern man that Eliade tried to build in many previous literary trials, akin to many of the men of letters and politicians he met in interwar Romania. This literary exercise in trying to find the perfect man but ending up with an opposite character is not without merit, framed within the context of history and elucidated in a later philosophical work: *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*. Amidst all these reflections and his creative or patriotic anxieties, the smallest details of daily life, such as moving to Avenida Elias Garcia 147, bore him and dampen his desire to correct his manuscripts, destined to oblivion.

The year 1942 finds him immerged in nervous crises or neurasthenia over the same questions of his lost youth, the daily life that wears him down. After a heart attack, he seems to awaken and delve into the existential question of the writer's survival in history, the foundation of which would later become central to his *The History of Religions*. His reflections on the literary and philosophical talent guide him towards concepts like that of creative destiny. Conversely, he is convinced that people without this creative destiny manifest more in the natural, economic, biological, or physical realms. However, it is the very choice to manifest in the spiritual realm that can propel to another spiritual level of existence.

Aware of the initiatory value of his travels to India, this second journey becomes for Eliade an experience of renunciation, first and foremost of his great love for Maitreyi: "But everything passes, this fire too has passed, a fire in which I believed I had found the total fulfillment of my being" (71), to better understand life as well as the eschatological sense of war and the anticipation of the end. Here in Portugal, a journey of such a different, reflective nature, Eliade manages to understand his first journey and to configure the concept of the human being as the atman who rediscovers the absolute in the cosmic of Brahman. During his stay in Portugal, Eliade makes a short nine-day trip to Spain, for which he feels an incredible affinity due to the beauty of the landscape, the language, and the culture, but which he truly appreciates upon his return to Portugal. Once again, he finds himself alone in Portugal, a stranger, but also with the emotional distance necessary to reflect on his own spiritual achievements as an orientalist.

In Portugal, he receives news of the reception of his latest works in Romania, such as a negative review of *Nuntă în cer* [*Marriage in Heaven*] (1938). The needles of the political censorship there bear the marks of a defamation campaign against him. Only now does Eliade realize his fall as an author in Romania, and goes through a grieving process, forced to let go of his hopes for future publications, of an entire artistic identity: the part that he played and that he identified with but that he was not aware of until he lost it. This too is a kind of self-experience (Battersby 29) that will ultimately liberate him towards new experiences as a writer and philosopher in France.

By responding to this malicious critique, Eliade begins a deeper process of self-analysis, explaining the fate of his nomadic characters by the specific spiritual context of the period between 1920 and 1930. He remembers writing this novel during his political imprisonment at Ciuc, a fact that undoubtedly made him dream of his escape and going away to faraway realms. The most keenly felt blow as a writer in Portugal seems to be the lack of literary friendships who could appreciate him at his true worth. He often thinks of Constantin Noica and Emil Cioran, his companions in exile in France, but he is disappointed by their superficial discussions on politics and historical anecdotes. His intellectual isolation without being able to share or publish his ideas, adds to the nostalgia for his homeland and a certain sense of failure in the mystical initiation begun in India, towards which he feels responsible to popularize oriental advanced views on achieving spiritual elevation.

The imminent death of Nina accentuates his sense of powerlessness against the force of time. Eliade thinks as an oriental mystic already, beyond the space and time limits. Poetically, the yellow leaves of the Aranjuez Park bring him beautiful memories but also make him think of the life he will have without Nina's presence: "whom one has loved for years, with whom one has lived, with whose life one has become irreversibly intertwined..." (131).

In 1943 he distances himself from his former right-wing political ties, upon the advice of some friends, and avoids a trip to Romania. The impossibility of changing the past immerses him deeply in introspection and unsettling observations about his literary destiny. On the other hand, this sensitivity remains a strength in analyzing his existence, giving him the necessary insight to analyze contemporary history as well. According to Eliade, Hitler feared mainly tens of thousands of drownings, whereas he could have defeated England with a few divisions and a hundred tanks. This same lack of war vision later costed Hitler millions of human losses in Russia. Eliade accurately predicts the end of the war with the Allied invasion of Europe because the English, a nation surrounded by water, found the sacrifice by drowning natural.

Eliade keeps up with contemporary French and Romanian literature. He admires *Un port la răsărit* (1941) [*A Port in the Sunrise*] by Radu Tudoran, for example, but realizes that a return to his home country is less possible than his assertion in the French literary scene. Similarly, most of his literary friendships draw him away from Romania and toward France.

In Portugal, Eliade reluctantly plays a key role in reminding Romanians that the Allies were not entirely pro-Russia. Eliade suspects António de Oliveira Salazar sought a good reason for his own exit from neutrality to align with the British. With the same clarity that allowed him to see the power of his future literary and philosophical projects, Eliade recognized Romania as trapped between German occupation and threatening Russia. At times because of the historical moment, Eliade's journal becomes a true treatise analyzing politics during the war. The years 1944 and 1945 are marked by Eliade's isolation and disappointment, both in what is happening in Eastern Europe and in Western philosophy. Despite his incredible initiation into Eastern mysticism through his scientific research—the yogis who walked on coals, swallowed blades, could levitate, disappear, and even stop their hearts—Eliade cannot understand the continuous ignorance on the West surrounding Indian mysticism and the lack of maturity in treating historical and political momentums in Europe.

Conclusions:

Thus, journal writing continues for him as the only writing possible as he sees himself as an orientalist, after his travel to India, exiled in the Western Europe, where he can no longer find people with the same intellectual affinities. Writing his journal in Portugal is essentially a therapeutic experience, it is writing as confession. Much like the journey itself, the travel notes are already projected as a place of memory and a source for his future writings. Its magical function comes from this sacred nature of writing as confession. According to Eliade in his *Jurnal Portughez*, the true magical power of confession lies in the certainty of redemption. Eliade's tragedy is that although he discovered the sense of the absolute, he still found himself trapped in history, specifically in the ambivalence of his historical time and the profane: "The paradox of being human; it means having the finite, the ephemeral, the nostalgia for the infinite and the eternal; having tried all experiences and known all adversities, all for the acquisition of integration into the Absolute, reintegration, and regeneration" (298).

Thus, Eliade's travel writing is the ideal example of travel literature as revealing a deep split between the western thinking and the eastern spiritual advancement. Often ignored by literary critics precisely

because of the hybrid nature of the travel genre, this blends many elements of memoir, letters, confession, and even fiction.[14]

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[14] The genre is appealing because: "three major reasons which revolve around real adventures, compelling narrators, and cultural perspectives that books in this genre present to readers" (Groom 43).

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Eleanor Roosevelt as a Queer Heroine in Susan Wittig Albert's *Loving Eleanor*

Abstract: How might we reimagine Eleanor Roosevelt not only as a political icon but as a figure whose entire life—private and public—queered traditional boundaries of being, sexuality, and power? Susan Wittig Albert presents this possibility in *Loving Eleanor* (2016), which examines the romantic connection between Lorena Hickok (Hick) and Eleanor Roosevelt (hereafter ER or Eleanor). The novel follows the queer bond and enduring friendship between them through a period from 1928 to 1962, while also depicting Eleanor's non-traditional relationships with multiple men. Albert's narrative also demonstrates how ER's energetic personality interacts with the sociopolitical environment of her time to show her adaptable approach to different social classes, racial and ethnic groups. Through queer theory and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concepts of rhizomatic proliferations, becoming-woman, becoming-minoritarian, and other becomings, this essay argues that the fictional Eleanor defies established gender, class, and sexual norms, embracing the ever-evolving and boundless nature of desire, sexuality, and transformation. The analysis reveals how Albert's depiction of ER differs from conventional stories about her to present an unconventional and complex portrait of her character.

Keywords: *Loving Eleanor*, Susan Wittig Albert, Eleanor Roosevelt, queer studies, Deleuze and Guattari

Introduction: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Queer Theoretical Framework

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) is widely regarded as one of the most influential and admired First Ladies in United States history. She held the position of First Lady from 1933 to 1945, and earned recognition as a "[t]eacher, journalist, broadcaster, diplomat, political activist, [and] human rights crusader" (Cook, "Foreword" xiii). Our online library catalog survey under "Eleanor Roosevelt" (April 2025) confirms this perception by showing her mainly as a statesperson and international icon.[15] Moreover, Angela Beauchamp, in her essay on Eleanor Roosevelt's on-screen representations, observes that she is also widely portrayed as a devoted wife and mother (n.p.). However, Beauchamp equally identifies a crucial number of queer portrayals of Eleanor which include her depiction as a woman who became saintly

[15] See *Eleanor Roosevelt and Adlai Stevenson (The World of the Roosevelts)* (Richard Henry, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); *The Forum and the Tower: How Scholars and Politicians Have Imagined the World, from Plato to Eleanor Roosevelt* (Mary Ann Glendon, OUP, 2011); *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II* (Doris Kearns Goodwin, Simon & Schuster, 1995); *Eleanor Roosevelt: First Lady, Humanitarian, and World Citizen (Spirit of America, Our People)* (Pam Rosenberg and Robin Gerber, Childs World Inc, 2003); *The First Lady of Radio: Eleanor Roosevelt's Historic Broadcasts* (Stephen Drury Smith—Editor, Blanche Wiesen Cook—Foreword, The New Press, 2014); *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Anti-Nuclear Movement: The Voice of Conscience (The World of the Roosevelts)* (Dario Fazzi, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); *Eleanor Roosevelt's Views on Diplomacy and Democracy: The Global Citizen* (Dario Fazzi and Anya Luscombe—Editors, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

by rejecting romantic life out of sorrow; as a "bad mother"; as uninterested "in 'normal' relationships and sex with men"; as "the angry feminist who hates men"; and most recently, as having led a distinctly separate and "queer" social life, often highlighting her as a lesbian or bisexual woman (n.p.). These portrayals, while not always flattering, reveal the complexity behind her public image. Together, they suggest a person who eludes simple categorization, which is the main focus of this essay.

This analysis examines Susan Wittig Albert's *Loving Eleanor* (2016) to reveal how Hick's reimagined perspective exposes ER's private desires and queer selfhood which merge with her public activism, thus disrupting both sanitized official narratives and reductive judgments of her life, personhood, and legacy.[16] Albert in her "A Biographical Afterword" describes this work as "a fictional interpretation" which is based on her reading of "the women's letters held in the FDR Library, on Hick's writings about ER, and on the multitudinous sources available" (294). The novel thus brings back a hidden history, as Emily Herring Wilson observes that Hick is absent from most photographs, which suggests some family members wanted to keep her out of the pictures (131). This pattern of suppression extends even to their correspondence. When writer Doris Faber accessed Hick and ER's passionate letters in 1978, she reacted with similar discomfort. In her book's "A Personal Note and Some Acknowledgments," Faber confesses she was so appalled that she asked the FDR Library director: "Eleanor Roosevelt was a great woman, and her effusively affectionate letters should be removed at least until the year 2000" (330-31). Faber's reaction reflects the entrenched heteronormative biases that shaped historical interpretations of ER. However, historian Blanche Wiesen Cook discloses the truth others had tried to suppress in her biography *Eleanor Roosevelt, Vol. 1: 1884–1933* (1992). "The romantic and passionate relationship between ER and Hick was [...] simply there—inevitable and undeniable," observes Cook, noting that, "[t]hey gave each other pleasure and comfort, trust and love. They touched each other deeply, loved profoundly, and moved on" (479). Cook further defines ER as a woman who "followed the impulses of her own vision, and the needs of her own heart" (7). Albert reimagines this silenced intimacy and all her other controversial desires and connections in a way that echoes Cook's sentiment. This essay uses queer theory and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concepts of becoming-woman, becoming-minoritarian, and rhizomatic connections to argue that Albert portrays Eleanor as a queer heroine who defies traditional gender, class, and sexual norms, as well as racial divides, actively seeking new becomings and fighting against social boundaries. The application of modern theoretical frameworks to study historical figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt might seem anachronistic at first but this method reveals the hidden nonconforming, non-heteronormative aspects of ER that standard accounts and scholarly works omit.

The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines queer as "having or relating to a gender identity or a sexuality that does not fit society's traditional ideas about gender or sexuality" ("Queer" n.p.). This emphasizes sexual identities outside mainstream norms, yet queer theory contests these classifications as well. Rachel Loewen Walker notes that "[t]here is no essential 'male' or 'female,' and consequently, there is no essential 'lesbian,' 'gay man,' or 'bisexual,' instead these subject-positions are the result of a pervasive heteronormativity that we cannot escape" (11). In Walker's assessment, non-normative sexual categories cannot establish stable classifications even though they exist. Jennifer Reed supports this understanding by stating:

> The point of queer is to conceptualize human connection outside of the terms of heteronormativity, outside of the binaries that structure straight/ gay. This is the great gift that queer offers to dominant culture as a

[16] Amy Bloom's *White Houses: A Novel* (2018) and Kelly O'Connor McNees's *Undiscovered Country* (2018) are historical novels (romances) that also reimagine the affair between these two women in their middle years. See also, Susan Ferentinos's *Courage to Love Gender and Sexuality in the Life of Eleanor Roosevelt* (2023).

> whole, not just to people who identify as LGBTQ. Queer allows us all to see the contradictions, repressions, and erasures that heteronormativity relies on for, and in, its very structure. It then also facilitates our understanding of the ramifications of this social structure. (*Queer Cultural Work* 57)

Reed demonstrates how queer dismantles repressive dualities that restrict all kinds of human expression and connection, instead of simply broadening pre-existing categories. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick develops these ideas in *Tendencies*. She frames queerness as an active process rather than a fixed identity by defining it as: "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically" (8). Sedgwick continues to explain:

> Queer is continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, *troublant*. The word "queer" itself means *across*—it comes from the Indo-European root-*twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart* … *across genders, across sexualities, across genres, across "perversions."* …The immemorial current that *queer* represents is as antiseparatist as it is antiassimilationist. Keenly, it is relational and strange. (xii, emphases original)

Sedgwick views queer as a spanning, crisscrossing energy, instead of just a term used to describe particular labels or genres. Through being queer or queering, one actively resists normative systems to develop novel, weird, and wayward ways of connecting and defining oneself.

Furthermore, in *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr present essays that explore queer theoretical perspectives informed by Deleuze and Guattari. The authors in the Introduction establish queer as a self-critical term, acting as a "vital force" with the potential "to affect and effect changes in the way one theorises, its capacity to produce deviant lines along established thinking and disciplines, its ability to queer the queer, that is, to undermine the self, to resist any normalization" (1). They and the contributors develop new queer methodologies of affirmative potentialities and propose "an ontology of becoming," "'rhizomatic relatedness,'" and "an open futurity, in terms of virtualities and not mere possibilities" (8). Other Deleuzo-Guattarian conceptual tools, including becoming-woman, becoming-minoritarian, and acting rhizomatically are also discussed, which we argue characterize ER's queer becomings.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize subjectivity or the self in terms of becoming, which does not signify a simple transformation, but an intricate, composite, and often difficult-to-control process:

> A becoming is always in the middle; one can only get it by the middle. A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both. If becoming is a block (a line-block), it is because it constitutes a zone of proximity and indiscernibility, a no-man's-land, a nonlocalizable relation sweeping up the two distant or contiguous points, carrying one into the proximity of the other—and the border-proximity is indifferent to both contiguity and to distance. (293)

Becoming is neither "a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification" (237), nor is it "an evolution by descent and filiation" (238). They accentuate that it "is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance" (238). Jeffrey J. Cohen and Todd R. Ramlow clarify and connect this to queerness: "Becomings have neither origin nor destination; like the queer, they are neither filial nor teleological. They do not confer identity—molar, sedimented, unitary—but produce an entity cobbled from disparate, provisionally allied parts, a relation of affects and speeds. Thus, becomings and their haecceities (thisnesses, herenesses, radical individuations) are always middles, never destinations" (para.

9). This emphasizes becoming as queerness-in-motion; not an identity to arrive at, but an ever-unfolding, disruptive act itself.

Notably, becoming, according to Deleuze and Guattari, implies becoming-woman. This idea, however, does not involve striving to be or resemble a woman, nor does it entail conforming to societal notions of femininity or altering one's physical body to align with traditional female attributes (275). They propose that every transformation originates and progresses through the process of becoming-woman (277). Elizabeth Grosz explains: "For women as much as for men, the processes of becoming-woman involve the destabilization of molar, or feminine, identity. If one *is* a woman, it remains necessary to become-woman as a way of putting into question the coagulations, rigidifications, and impositions required by patriarchal (although this may well be a term they do not use) power relations" (176, emphasis original). Grosz further elaborates that becoming-woman denotes "fragmenting and freeing up lines of flight, 'liberating' multiplicities, corporal and otherwise, that identity subsumes under the one" (178). Becoming-woman, then, is not about assuming a static womanhood or displaying femininity, but about undoing the system that defines woman as subordinate.

If the process of becoming-woman disrupts fixed identities, becoming-minoritarian takes this disruption to a collective political level. Deleuze and Guattari explain that minorities may exist as subgroups within dominant systems, their very marginality becomes a site of creativity and change (105-06), generating "uncontrollable movements and deterritorializations of the mean or majority" (106). This implies "the breaking-away from power relations that cause an injustice to others" (Waghid 68). How can someone like ER, who occupies a privileged status, practice becoming-minoritarian? She demonstrates this process by breaking down the rigid social structures of her wealthy traditional family and cultivating transformative solidarities with marginalized groups which we examine in detail. Becoming-minoritarian, similar to queerness, develops flexible alliances which fight against oppressive systems.

The process of becoming-woman, becoming-minoritarian or becoming in general requires rhizomatic connections which means radical interrelatedness. The biological term *rhizome* which the *Cambridge Dictionary* defines as "a stem of some plants that grows horizontally along or under the ground and produces roots and leaves" ("Rhizome" n.p.), functions as Deleuze and Guattari's central metaphor for this process. They distinguish rhizomatic systems from arboreal ones: unlike a tree with its vertical growth and fixed roots, a rhizome grows horizontally, constantly forming new connections and uprooting itself (21). They explain: "Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome" (9). Rhizomes grow adventitiously; they are simultaneously systematic yet perpetually overflowing. As Jonathan Kemp clarifies, such rhizomatic structures generate "not singular but multiple, inhabited by a radically constitutive and productive otherness" (161). The emphasis on non-linear connections establishes an interactive ontology which develops through continuous activities of connection-making, disruption, and reconfiguring ties. Our examination of ER is guided by these conceptual frameworks, which highlight her unconventional alliances, queer sexual practices, and boundary-pushing positions.

Eleanor Roosevelt as a Queer Heroine in Susan Wittig Albert's *Loving Eleanor*

Loving Eleanor is told by Hick, whom Michael Hill describes as "a pioneering reporter, noted author, Depression-era New Dealer [and] confidant of Eleanor Roosevelt" (n.p.). As Hill documents, she wrote biographical works such as *The Story of Helen Keller* and *The Story of Eleanor Roosevelt* (n.p.). Her dual perspective as both insider and observer of ER's life makes her an authentic voice in Albert's fictional memoir. At the same time, it allows Albert to delve into ER's inner life and less visible relationships and

provide a more intimate portrayal. Hick introduces Eleanor as "the lonely woman whose wistful, half-hopeful vulnerability had so surprised and touched [her]" (Albert 49). Her husband shows no interest in her, and her mother-in-law displays open hostility toward her (65). Within this unhappy domesticity, her restlessness becomes palpable. She is willing to and has already begun to transform and break free from her restrictive marital duties. Hick's observations of EL reveal her rhizomatic aspects:

> Mrs. Roosevelt was an anomaly, and as a reporter, I loved anomalies, especially when the anomaly was a woman doing something that made her stand out as something other than a wife, a mother, and a clotheshorse. This woman went out on the campaign trail, edited the *Women's Democratic News*, wrote magazine articles on women in politics, taught at an exclusive girls' school, and, with two friends, owned a furniture factory on the Roosevelt estate. A furniture factory? Now, *there* was an anomaly for you. (25, emphasis original)

Here, Hick demonstrates how Eleanor pursues various activities which go beyond conventional female roles. The two friends mentioned in this passage are Nancy Cook and Marion Dickerman, while the factory is Val-Kill Industries, which was established in 1926 near Fall Kill (Ferentinos 1), and served as a job source for local young craftspeople (2). Through this venture, Eleanor practices business activities while building an entrepreneurial community of women, which demonstrates her decentered lateral growth, the rhizomatic imperative that Deleuze and Guattari describe as, "Always follow the rhizome by rupture; lengthen, prolong, and relay the line of flight; make it vary, until you have produced the most abstract and tortuous of lines of *n* dimensions and broken directions" (11, emphasis original). Eleanor maintains personal connections with Cook and Dickerman and other lesbian couples including Elizabeth Read and Esther Lape (Albert 52). During a time when such attachments were socially disapproved and called "'[f]emale impersonators'" (52), ER's alliances show her progressive understanding and acceptance of different interpersonal configurations. According to Adrienne Rich, identifying and connecting with other women is a crucial act that unleashes immense female power:

> Woman identification is a source of energy, a potential springhead of female power, curtailed and contained under the institution of heterosexuality. The denial of reality and invisibility to women's passion for women, women's choice of women as allies, life companions, and community, the forcing of such relationships into dissimulation and their disintegration under intense pressure have meant an incalculable loss to the power of all women *to change the social relations of the sexes, to liberate ourselves and each other*. (34, emphases original)

Through women-bonding, Eleanor too finds her liberation, bypassing heterosexual dependency and its constraints. Additionally, these are not isolated, self-serving actions, but network-building and resource-sharing activities. They foreshadow her future dedication to increasingly nontraditional positions and extensive connections. For instance, with Hick, she proliferates her and women's presence nationwide through rhizomatic offshoots such as making appearances and hosting radio shows, which can be argued as a catalyst for more and more visible becoming-woman: "*Why can't a woman think, be practical and a good business woman and still have a mind of her own?*" (Albert 213, emphases original) queries Eleanor, explicitly challenging the 1930s bourgeois domesticity that confined even aristocratic women. As Maurine Beasley also observes: "Through her own ability to gain attention, [Eleanor Roosevelt] was able to put women as a group before the public. Trapped in routines that limited their aspirations and experiences, it was essential for women to maintain contact with others and to place their issues on the agenda for public discussion" (73). Hick further recounts how Eleanor's public engagement manifested as "an infinite succession of things [that] pulled [her] in hundreds of different directions, and it was hard to imagine a

future when she would no longer be a national celebrity […] Eleanor was […] a dervish, whirling, whirling, whirling away" (Albert 233). Eleanor's becoming-woman is the antithesis of immobility, self-curtailment, and ornamental existence.

As the fictional memoir progresses, we encounter a more private Eleanor, hence other dimension of her becoming-woman, through her intimacy with Earl Miller, her bodyguard, which suggests an attitude beyond traditional marriage norms. In the presence of Miller, Hick observes a palpable change in the air, a sense of something brewing between them: "He sat on the sofa beside Mrs. Roosevelt. Her fingers carelessly brushed his knee, his arm lay across the sofa back behind her shoulders, and the warmth and unaffected familiarity between them was unmistakable" (63). Eleanor's casual touch enacts what Deleuze and Guattari celebrate: "Go across, get out, break through, make a beeline, don't get stuck on a point. Find the line of separation, follow it or create it, to the point of treachery" (186-87). Namely, her unruly closeness signals her resistance to the rigid decorum expected of a woman in her position.

Later, amidst FDR's 1932 presidential campaign, she enacts becoming-woman more fully by becoming-queer through her passionate bond with Hick who covered her during FDR's presidential campaign (Albert 68). During their train ride, they confide in each other about their childhood experiences of being unloved and unwanted. Similar to Hick, Eleanor did not have a trouble-free childhood, neither was her life free of struggle (80-82). The shared history of struggle and feeling unloved draws them closer. Their emotions continue to grow stronger until they develop romantic feelings for each other. At that time ER was 48. Hick notes that "somehow we had stepped into the next improbable chapter of our story. On that first day, our glances caught often and held long enough—over heads, across crowded rooms, through the soft blue haze of cigarette smoke—to make me believe that she was remembering our time on the train" (85). The statement confirms their queer desire and affectionate tie and validates Rachel Adams's argument that "Heterosexuality and its institutions are always threatened by the polymorphous nature of desire itself" (556).

The two women embark on several escapades together. During the summer of 1933, they had an "entirely alone and utterly anonymous" "romantic escape" (Albert 158, 156) across various destinations, including New Hampshire, Vermont, Quebec, and the Gaspé Peninsula (156). The following year, they visit Puerto Rico (207) before exploring the western region of the United States (217). The couple express affection by gentle cheek caresses and soft kisses (87-88). Hick narrates: "With only our hearts as witness, we lay together, the length of our bodies measuring our passion as we taught each other to become the lovers neither of us had never had, the lovers both of us had only imagined" (100). They exchange letters which contain sensual and promiscuous content. Eleanor writes: "*Hick darling, Oh! how good it was to hear your voice, it was so inadequate to try and tell you what it meant, Jimmy was near and I couldn't say 'je t'aime et je t'adore' as I longed to do*." In another letter, she affectionately expresses: "*My pictures are nearly all up and I have you in my sitting room where I can look at you most of my waking hours! I can't kiss you so I kiss your picture good-night and good-morning*" (139, emphases original). However, their romantic bond does not last forever; it transforms into a profound friendship. Thus, Albert displays ER's same-sex intimacy as an artificial and slippery aspect of her sexuality, which aligns perfectly with queer theoretical understandings of queerness.

Following her sensual involvement with Hick, Eleanor develops another significant bond. This time it is Joseph Lash, a young Jewish man, who held the position of Executive Secretary of the American Student Union. She meets him in 1939, who is the same age as her son Elliott (253), thus making him 30 years old and her 55 at that time. Hick observes that Eleanor's infatuation with him is evident in her actions and gestures towards him. She recounts:

> When Joe moved into an apartment in Manhattan, Eleanor sent him an expensive armchair from Wanamaker's. For his birthday, she gave him a new Pontiac convertible. When he was at the White House, she didn't make any secret of her affection, and he seemed to enjoy telling everyone about their friendship. Anyway, it wasn't long before Washington society was buzzing about Eleanor and her young man. (254)

ER's pattern of deep connections that break social rules about age, gender roles, and social expectations matches exactly what Margrit Shildrick writes about sexuality: "Rather than being goal-driven and singular, sexuality [is] a network of flows, energies and capacities that are always open to transformation, and so cannot be determined in advance" (121).

Hence, even later in her life, her fluid Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming-woman persists. In "A Biographical Afterword" of her fictional memoir, Albert notes that Eleanor also develops a passionate attachment to David Gurewitsch, who is her doctor, travel companion, and with whom she shares her New York residence (291). While this relationship is only touched upon as an afterword, Gurewitsch's wife, Edna P. Gurewitsch, provides more detail in her 2002 memoir, *Kindred Souls: The Friendship of Eleanor Roosevelt and David Gurewitsch*. She claims that ER expressed to her husband in 1955, "'You know without my telling you that I love you as I love and have never loved anyone else'" (qtd. in *Publishers Weekly* n.p.). This final significant bond completes the pattern of ER's "unconventional intimacies" coexisting with her public roles as First Lady and mother (Reed, "Queering" 9). Crucially, these are overlapping layers of becoming rather than successive phases. Her last relationship, similar to her bonds with Hick, Lash, and earlier lesbian couples, demonstrates the "antiseparatist as [much as] antiassimilationist" energy of queerness (xii) which Sedgwick describes. ER refuses to be predictable: to follow heteronormative paradigms or establish a permanent lesbian identity, instead she lives within the "open mesh of possibilities" (8) that Sedgwick notes.

Eleanor's rhizomatic connections, becomings—woman or lesbian—involve her becoming-minoritarian as well. She develops a minoritarian stance by connecting herself with people from diverse walks of life, finding a line of flight from her segmented life she was born into, a life that, as Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider note, expected her to "marry well, raise a family, and shine in society" (230). ER is also reluctant to conform to the expectations placed upon her as a First Lady. She disrupts the tradition of First Ladies who, as The People Profiles biographical documentary notes, had to abandon their occupations and ambitions when their husbands became president (24:58-25:06). Determined to avoid being "a hostess for social functions" or "a prisoner of the White House" (Albert 111), "forced onto the treadmill of receptions and official dinners and dedications" (67-68), Eleanor continually expands her activities beyond these traditional roles, as previously discussed. In alignment with the notion that becoming-minoritarian "necessitates a labor of power (*puissance*), an active micropolitics" (Deleuze and Guattari 292, emphasis original), ER is dedicated to disadvantaged communities. She assists impoverished individuals during the Great Depression, through projects like the experimental homestead community of Arthurdale (Albert 168) and Camp Tera, one of the first federal camps established to provide employment training for jobless and homeless women (185); supports Jewish refugees escaping Nazi Germany, and advocates for the rights of Black residents in Washington (191). These endeavors embody what Reed terms "a queer methodology," which rejects both discrete categories and understands the human experience's inherent contradictions (*Queer Cultural Work* 86). As Reed clarifies: "Roosevelt's threat to dominance, based on gender, race, and class or nationalism, was made accessible to her through her queer orientation that allowed her to look outside of the privilege that might have swallowed her up" ("Queering" 18). Thus, ER's queer way of becoming-minoritarian reconfigures power as an alliance not as hierarchy.

Conclusions

The strength of ER in *Loving Eleanor* comes from her refusal to be contained: she rejects the ceremonial and decorative aspects of the First Lady role, uses desire both as a counter-heteronormative pleasure, and channels her aristocratic advantages into revolutionary solidarity. The ER Albert portrays goes beyond being a queer historical figure who merely challenges norms, but she emerges as a vital queer embodiment of Deleuzo-Guattari's becomings, rhizomatic entanglements, and minoritarian politics. Albert presents her as a living proof of their declaration: "Make rhizomes, not roots, never plant! Don't sow, grow offshoots! Don't be one or multiple, be multiplicities! Run lines, never plot a point! Speed turns the point into a line! Be quick, even when standing still!" (24). Eleanor uses her body and intellect together with political alliances to escape from the fixed points of identity to instead "run lines" across the regimented times and spaces of her lifetime. She, most importantly, is depicted as someone who understands the essence of loving, exemplifying the following statement of Deleuze and Guattari: "Knowing how to love does not mean remaining a man or a woman; it means extracting from one's sex the particles, the speeds and slownesses, the flows, the *n* sexes that constitute the girl of *that* sexuality" (277, emphases original). The reader, ultimately, sees ER in a new light; that is, as a queer rhizomatic subject who dynamically unlocks vitalities, energies, desires, lovings, and relentlessly defies the pull of fixed identities.

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Retelling History Through Imagined Spaces: Examples of Literary Cartography from Select Postcolonial Malayalam Novels

Abstract: Cartography, or the art of mapmaking, has been used by past and present writers to locate the settings of their stories. When it comes to imaginary settings, at times, the act of marking the place on the map of the real world implies that it has a different intention than just being the backdrop of the action of the story. Using select indigenous Indian novels translated from the Malayalam language to English, this paper will study how fictional spaces created and marked on the map by writers of Indian regional languages become a counter-narrative for recorded history. The paper will examine how, in a postcolonial context, a narrative text becomes an ethnographic and social commentary that has tried to transcend local boundaries and identify itself as a resistance narrative to the hegemonic powers. Questions like what happens when history, narrative, and geography merge; how the history of a place or space influences one's identity, knowledge, and power, especially in an imagined topography; how these imagined spaces remain contested and unstable; how Malayali writers become cartographers, locating an imagined space within real ones, how they offer a silent critique of known Indian colonial history, etc., will be addressed.

Keywords: literary cartography, resistance narratives, alternate History, representational spaces, Postcolonialism

Introduction

The concept of mapping has infiltrated fields of the humanities that are geographically oriented since it is an epistemological endeavor that presents many ontological possibilities. Cartography, or the process of mapmaking, has entered a dynamic era where the object of the map itself is not just the source of empirical data but also makes meanings post-representationally. They are simultaneously inscriptions, practices, immutable mobiles, actants, and propositions. This implies that maps are not just representations of the real world but are sites of production, forms of enablement for both the makers and the users, transferable structures of knowledge across space and time, historically contingent objects that are actualized through their interactions with other actants and actors; and ideological constructions that present the world through the spatial ontologies that they put forward.

Literary cartography addresses the topic of mapping places in fictional and narrative spaces. When real and fictional worlds are compared, the latter are distinguished by their fragmentary existence and vague boundaries that are difficult to localize (Surgeoner 648). However, they also present the advantage of not having a fixed size or details, which the writer uses to link the place he created to any period. The cultural agency of these imagined spaces can negate the hegemony imposed on them through previous geographies drawn for the actual spaces they are based on, indicating that they can be used as reminders of dominance and an avenue of resistance. In this sense, postcolonial novels offer some material for destabilizing dominant geographies' spatial and temporal coordinates (Stephens 255).

Postcolonial works in indigenous languages that engage with literary cartography invite a symptomatic reading since their readers know what to expect and are often consistently successful in finding it. This is mainly because the colonial discourse, encompassing binary oppositions, is familiar to all. This is more so in the case of works set in imagined places within these nations, as they enable representations of 'other'

people and 'other' places. In order to study the nature and methods of resistance against hegemonic powers, this article will study *A Preface to Man* (2016) written by Subhash Chandran, *Tales of Athiranippadam* (2013) by S. K. Pottekkatt, *Litanies of the Dutch Battery* (2010) by N.S. Madhavan, and *The Legends of Khasak* by O.V. Vijayan, which were initially written in Malayalam, the official language of Kerala, one of the Southernmost states of India. These novels, set in the fictional places called Thachanakkara, Athiranippadam, Lanthan Bathery, and Khasak, are set in similar time frames and portray various shifts of power in the history of India and Kerala and localized struggles caused by it, which have not received the attention that they deserve from historians, among which the event of colonialism is only one.

The geography of the imagined spaces is very important to analyze, as it isolates these places from the real world they are part of, enabling the writers to make decisions of their choice by shedding light on specific histories and cultural practices. Still, these places talk about very real experiences that various parts of Kerala have had to go through. The setting of topographical features can show how the writers draw the boundaries to divide the real world from the fictional. Thachanakkara and Athiranippadam have rivers and fields drawing their borders. The Chetali mountain and the wastelands around it bind Khasak.

Meanwhile, Lanthan Bathery is an island across the Vembanad backwaters from Kerala's biggest city, Kochi, with two hands of Periyar, the longest and fastest river in Kerala, forming the East and West boundaries. Bound by geographical structures that allow them to have an authentic identity and history, irrespective of the 'written world,' the four spaces tell the stories that the people of Kerala find necessary when mainstream national history does not. This article will provide a rationale for taking literature more seriously because of what it can offer through devising a corrective to official histories, a method of resisting them. This process is pertinent because literature does not have the same pretensions to power or authority that official histories have. Even though the literary registers in the four novels are different— for example, when Vijayan uses magical realism, Pottekkatt is a realist in his portrayal of space— the traces of the history of struggles are imprinted into their ideals of what a place is, in the same way. Retelling them from a different perspective is very important to all these writers, despite the method they use to narrativize them. Hence, looking at what strands of history they have decided to include in their geographical creations, rather than analyzing these registers, becomes vital.

Power, Politics, and Construction of Space

Colonization was a process that resulted from the search for new places and geographies and the scientific fervor to know about the world. Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift argue that "neither theories nor social processes exist without geographical extent and historical duration" (3). Thus, studying both space and time together becomes essential for the academic. Immanuel Kant once proposed that time was a byproduct of representation and could not stand alone (n.p). Time and space have been interlinked irreversibly since Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity was introduced. In literature, time becomes visible, and space becomes a response to time and history.

Time and history are always bound with centers of power, as it is a common thought that history is written by those who win. Hence, sometimes, they tend to be fictitious. Space is the only entity that stands uncorrupted by this fiction and hence can be used as the anchor for the alternative narratives the writers want to write. Michel Foucault says, "The spatialising description of discursive realities gives on to the analysis of related effects of power" (22). The structuralist-derived spatial turn did not amount to a denial of time; it was a particular way of handling what is called time and history. The identities of spaces and narratives are almost always the fruits of power relations since literature is also always a cultural production. Imagined spaces in the selected texts thus become contact zones, where subjects eliminated from written history or recorded geography can interact.

Geopolitics has always had a significant role in shaping the history of the world, especially the colonial empires, where hegemonic powers explained identities. The writers in Malayalam do what bell hooks calls the act of "choosing marginality" (54), which is a radical turn. They create the "third space" to present the original form of their subaltern identity and to resist the overarching power structure more conveniently, which liberates them from the confinements and limitations of their histories written by outsiders. Here, the writers recenter the narrative to the indigenous areas and the margins of an earlier world and restructure every form of power that once suppressed them. The literatures thus themselves become spaces of difference. Through the literary cartography employed in such works, the information and inflection of cultural identities and regional histories formed by the geopolitical 'other' can be questioned through what Susan Stanford Friedman calls "geopolitical literacy" (107). Here, geography and history come together, sometimes complementing each other and at others, rewriting either one, leading to a method of criticizing ahistorical information. Critical literary cartography is employed to analyze a text so that the history of these spaces portrayed can be studied to help the production of new meanings that only geographical knowledge can make possible (Berte 195). In this background, relations between space and power arise, whether colonial, gendered, or racial of nature.

History can be seen to go through transgressions in the imagined places of regional literature, reminding that Bertrand Westphal's idea of transgression (41), which is used in spatial reference with crossing a boundary, has changed, coming to mean 'opposing a dominant structure or order.' Transgression then becomes a form of resistance that is unpredictable, increasing the tension rather than coming to a final solution. Malayali writers thus create alternate realities and histories through transgressions in literary cartography. The imagined place becomes what Michel Foucault calls "heterotopia" (24). The term is used to describe a space that can only exist in the language and be created by it, which is also a site of resistance, where the people who inhabit it deviate from an overarching social system. "Heterotopia" is coined using the Greek words "heteros," meaning "another," and "topos," meaning "place," and such spaces become places of experimentation, where methods of resistance are tried out, and alternatives for existing power systems are tested. They become counter-hegemonic even if they do not have to actively oppose power structures, as the main objective is to expose them.

The cartography of imagined places is a landmarking method that aims to preserve a shared history through a narrative by assembling a group of heterogeneous cultures and representing them on a map. Bodenhamer et al. say that mapping is "not confined to the tangible or material, but include[s] the discursive and ideological dimensions of place, the dreams, hopes, and fears of residents" (132). All voices are thus heard in the narrative, and everyone is represented. A new idea about "place" in literature is acquired. This place is closer to the "imago mundi," or the "image of the world," which is created by people belonging to that world. This relationship between history and the place is also connected through time. A place or a space is considered static, whereas time is a dynamic and mobile entity that produces history. In the case of imagined spaces, these ideas are deconstructed to create a time-space continuum, where both are interlinked and dynamic to produce meanings together. Space thus debuts its position as a relational entity rather than an absolute one.

The imagined location or place can always be analyzed as the production of friction between histories and powers. This is per what Michel Foucault has to say—that "a whole history remains to be written of spaces—which would at the same time be a history of powers" (15). The history of the imagined village of Thachanakkara in the novel *A Preface to Man* by Subhash Chandran could help us understand this notion better. In the form of a detailed, experienced history of the accession of the village by native powers, the author exposes individual power struggles that small towns and villages went through, even before the colonial era. In one part of the novel, while narrating the history of Thachanakkara, he says:

> Though the Raja of Kochi was right next door, Thachanakkara was ruled by the kings of Thiruvithamkoor, residing somewhere in the remote, faraway south. The erstwhile Venad, exalted by Marthaaanda Varma as Thiruvithamkoor, had the districts of Paravoor and Aalangad girdling Thachanakkara in the north; they were the central knots in the rope used in the tug of war that went on for centuries, pulled from the south by Thiruvithamkoor and from the north by the Zamorin. The Rama Varmas of Kochi stood in the middle, looking with childlike curiosity at this tug of war. Finally, Marthaanda Varma won. Though located right under Kochi Raja's Adam's apple, Thachanakkara folk began to offer their prayers turning southwards, and learnt to trade with the chakram coins of Sree Padmanabhan of Thiruvithamkoor. (43)

The inefficiency of the Kings of Cochin is thus mentioned from the standpoint view of a subject. This part shows how the history of powers that rule a land changes how people in it view authority.

Representational Spaces

Cartography or map-making was born from the idea of a 'controlling gaze,' where the navigators of the West could see 'others' and subjugate them. What should be included and excluded in a map was always a question for these makers. A story about a place marked on a map was reduced to what was known about the place, whoever the context writer was. It later led to the classification and symbolization of 'the other,' where hierarchies were created. Writers use the same method to create 'invisible' spaces of resistance.

Henri Lefebvre's ideas of "representation of space" and "representational spaces" (33) are to be perused in the case of spaces in literature to gain a deeper understanding of them. While the former can be seen in any text, a mirror of the real world, the latter is always fictional, and concerns stories never told. A paper town a writer creates in his work would have the meaning they give it. Therefore, its history will also be informed by the writers' experienced history, making the narrative more authentic than any other historiographies, as writers perceive space sensorily. Bertrand Westphal explains this notion using the term "polysensoriality," saying that "space is subject to the infinite variety of sensory perception in a literary text" (33). Hence, even though the visible is always given prominence, it can be seen that imagined spaces in literature transgress this sensory hierarchy, giving way to what is also "felt" by a subject. These spaces thus become historical as well as reinvented. Thus, in the case of imagined spaces, historical and fictional features, including place and characters, come together in a coherent time frame to retell the history that has been forgotten. Facts and fiction thus combine, bridging the gap between the two.

The novelists studied in this article position themselves as marginal voices, offering silent criticism from their peripheral positions on the official history written by mainland India. The imaginary places in their novels become oblique references to real places. They also tend to emphasize Kerala's geography as separate and exclusive to mainland India's political geography/territory as a part of a desire to retain an intact and untainted space and an identity uncontaminated by the existing territorial dominance. It can also be considered to be a desire for cultural autonomy. There is an alternate archive of knowledge that their novels are a repository of, and this archive competes against a mainstream cartographic consciousness that constructs and understands the regional identity of Kerala in a certain way.

Imaginary Spaces as Contact Zones

The aforementioned fictional places portray oppositions and binaries existing in a postcolonial nation and become a 'contact zone' where mediations between the different levels of hegemony occur. Clive Barnett says that this middle ground presented through imagined spaces "implies the need to shift away from a strong emphasis on the irredeemable Manichean conflict between colonizer and colonized, towards concepts which focus upon processes of cross-cultural communication" (54). Thus, these spaces become the site for the "interconnections and entwinements of different cultures and societies" where

relations between representations, discourses, individual and collective subjects, and worldly realities could be studied (Barnett 54).

The trade and colonial histories of Lanthan Bathery and Athiranippadam are great examples of these exchanges. The narrator of *Litanies of Dutch Battery* says that history is the most critical commodity Lanthan Bathery ever imports, which grows dense in the confinement of the island. The history that comes alive on this island is its trade relations with various parts of the world, which in every other narrative is outshone by the nearby port city of Kochi. The narrator talks about how no historian was ever interested in excavating the island, which led to history missing out on finding the stories behind Venetian ducats, remnants of enslaved Black people, Chinese jewelry, belongings of Carmelite priests, etc., which were found plenty on the island. These moments are remnants of a contact zone formed through trade, the legacy of which still exists on the island, even in the form of vegetation. The island is home to Portuguese trees that are alien to the people from the mainland, like guava, cashew, breadfruit, and Anjili. There are also other points of contact in the island's history. It is the Dutch who bring lavatories to the island. There is also a Portuguese-built chapel on the road north, a battery consisting of five cannons mouthed by the Dutch, and a Dutch palace in Lanthan Bathery. Another unpopular history that the novel brings back up is the presence of black slaves in Kochi, brought there from Africa by the Portuguese. After the Dutch seized Kochi, the Portuguese dug holes and buried their gold and treasures in nearby islands, along with alive slaves, to guard them. Even though the place is imaginary, the history of the Lanthan Bathery, which has been a 'contact zone,' is thus heavily influenced by the history of real islands near Kochi, starting from its name. N.S. Madhavan in his novel, gives a detailed account:

> The Portuguese, who fought alongside the King of Cochin against the common foe, the Zamorin, the ruler of Kozhikode, slowly established the hegemony over Kochi. They forcefully took many places on lease from the King of Kochi, including a thickly wooded island, which later came to be called Lanthen Bathery. Later, it acquired a name, Kamponjikad—Company Woods, which later became Lanthen Bathery. In 1663, the Dutch defeated the Portuguese, and the Dutch flag began to flutter in the Kochi skies. In the battle for Fort Emanuel, the Portuguese headquarters, Dutch Presbyterians killed many Portuguese Catholics and destroyed ten churches in Kochi. They converted the famous Santa Cruz Church into a pepper warehouse. The Dutch then turned their anger on the local Catholics, converts from Hindu fisherfolk and other low castes, and the children the Portuguese had fathered from local women. Many of them escaped from Kochi to save the new faith that had been liberated from the slavery they had endured in their former religion and their lives. Some reached Kamponjikad, which was under the Portuguese. The Latin Catholics of Lanthen Bathery trace their origins to this exercise. Kamponjikad changed hands and went to the Dutch. They built bungalows there after they got a monopoly over the right to transport drinking water from Aluva from the King of Kochi. They constructed a palace for the governor at Lanthen Bathery. On the promontory of Lanthen Bathery, where the river Periyar bent westward to join the Vembanad backwaters, the Dutch mounted a battery of five cannons to control the river trade. That is how our island got its name, Lanthen Bathery, or Dutch battery. (43)

The British colonization of India and its effects have been well documented. Still, *Tales of Athiranippadam* by S. K. Pottekkatt details the localized impacts of the phenomenon in Kerala, which has not been written in the national narrative of colonial rule. During the period of colonization, Indians fought the fights of the English for them in lands they did not even know about. The character Kunjappu's military stories after his return, including those about the wars he fought in Basra in the Mesopotamian deserts, shed light on this event. The presence of military barracks near Athiranippadam is one way the author has situated the phenomenon. The novel talks about how brothels were instituted for the soldiers in a land where the culture was practically non-existent. The text also talks about how the white soldiers held shooting practices against mud walls in the open grounds of villages and how the locals learned about the new

sport of "golf" (152) when the Whites started using their meadows for it, keeping them out. The natives are thus ousted and kept away from their lands. Pottekkatt even accounts for how native mythological beings lost their lands because of the event. He says, "The noise and the pungent smell of gunpowder must have got on the nerves of the Yakshis and demons and driven them to some other peaceful place" (159).

Myth and Production of Multicultural Spaces

The history of power in a land also stems from its mythology and legends written by its people ages ago. These legends often do not correspond with facts, though they are derived from them and often influenced by different Ur texts. Several of these mythologies do not exist in the archives and are relevant only in the places where they are believed. An example is how the Muslim history of Kerala, which is recorded in history, starts from the trade relations of Arabia with its port cities. In contrast, The *Legends of Khasak* tells another story. It talks about the legend of the Badrins, warriors blessed by the Prophet, arriving at Khasak in a cavalcade of a thousand and one horses led by Sayed Mian Sheikh, the holiest warrior. The stone crypt of the Sheikh who died there is built on top of Mount Chetali and, in the later years, becomes a religious shrine for the natives, and it is this particular history that is said to have led to a solid Muslim population in the village. Twelve mosques in the village stand in a ring around it, whose construction dates nobody knows clearly about. Vijayan says, "The twelfth mosque, called the Mosque of the King, overlooked the Araby tank, a pond of crystal water, to which kabandhas, beings dismembered in ancient wars, came to bathe their unhealed wounds" (13). These are the legends of unheard wars that have not been recorded in the history of the state of Kerala. Still, they influence the village's power structures, whether through religion or education. The geography of Khasak, with the looming Chetali mountains in the backdrop and the eerie water bodies, lends a hand in the creation and reclamation of such legends and histories.

The etymology of the place name "Thachanakkara" in *A Preface to Man* is also based on a popular legend. It says, "On the other side of the river on the South was Uliyannoor, the land of Perumthachan, the legendary master craftsman. Thachanakkara is the land that sent the chisel wielder or 'thachan' to 'akkare' or the other bank" (Chandran 63).

Stripping mythology away, the history of a place has almost always been represented as a linear progression. Thus, the exclusion of whatever is outside the narrative of linear progression has rarely been represented in literature. It is not 'this happened along with this,' but 'this came after this.' Hence, in creating these fictional spaces, regional writers have used experiences from unrepresented cultures and areas as superimpositions to give the space an identity. National or international events have always influenced the narratives of any region, but the latter also always finds a way to criticize the former. While identity is performed through culture, culture is also an avenue through which one might feel a sense of belonging. Culture should be practiced regularly to maintain it. In these imagined places, a conflict arises since multiple identities practice their own cultures simultaneously, creating an 'other' within this native community. How one region exercises its identity that it claims to be different from the others is a big question. If being different includes categorizing some as above or below the other, then that leads to the problem of what power one exerts to claim itself above the other. The social history of Kerala, based on religion, caste, class, etc., drives the distinguishment here. The subjectivity of one and the power of another would then necessarily bleed into the literature that talks about it. In the case of the selected texts, examples are given of how the multitude of religions and castes lead to this discrimination, which even results in practices like untouchability.

Most people in Vijayan's Khasak are Muslims, and Madhavan's Lanthan Bathery are Christians. Chandran's Thachanakkara and Pottekkatt's Athiranippadam show the majority as Hindus. The authors

portray the marginalized within the imagined space through caste and religions in these villages. The basket weavers of Khasak are seen to be living in the mountains, a martial clan known as the Thottiyas appear as wanderers, and the immigrant community of Pandarams and the Pariahs live in outlying slums belonging to the untouchables. The island of Lanthan Bathery also shows a similar hierarchization of space—the fisherfolk and the low-caste Pulayas live on the outskirts of the village, on the waterfront. The children that the Portuguese had from local women, also called "Parangis" (native tongue for "Portuguese"), live near the chapel built by the Portuguese.

The God worshipped in the main temple of Thachanakkara has also been carefully selected. Thachanakkara is a land that coils around the temple in its center, where Lord Parasuraman is worshipped. Local mythology claims that he cleaved the land of Kerala with his axe from the sea and apportioned it as a gift amongst the upper castes. Hence, the land's Brahmins (upper castes) live very close to the temple, and people of the lower castes are not allowed entry into the temple where the deity is an Aryan upper-caste North Indian. Instead, they go to the sacred grove to the West of Thachanakkara, where the deity is the indigenous God named Muthappan. The description of this casteist practice also gives an inside look into the local aftermath of the legendary Temple Entry Right Proclamation of Kerala, allowing lower castes to enter temples. The other side of the positive historical movement gets light shone upon it in this way. Similar sacred groves like Karot kavu, Poovarashukavu or Cherumi's kavu, Maruthi grove, etc., can also be seen in Athiranippadam, where the pariahs, theeyars, and the pulayars, people of lower castes, go to worship their Gods. The idols here are hooded serpents or the Kuttichathan, mythological beings endemic to Kerala.

The perceptions of natives towards migrant religions like Islam and Christianity are also portrayed in detail in texts like *Tales of Athiranippadam* and *A Preface to Man*, where Hindus are the majority. In Athiranippadam, a clear distinction between religions is made by a brook at the western boundary, on which stands the Sayed Ali Bridge. The land on the bridge's other end belongs to the Muslims, with high-walled mansions, mosques, ponds, and fish markets. Muslims do not live in Thachanakkara either, but in Elookkara and Kayintikkara, two villages to the South. Meanwhile, the increasing Christian population is also a subject in these novels. With the caste system and its unjust practices like untouchability, the people from lower castes in Kerala started to convert to Christianity, and hence, the period these novels are set in shows an increased population of Christians. While Catholics populate the island of Lanthan Bathery, the people of Khasak are weary of the Evangelists settling beside the river, building their tile factories, and running successful businesses. They are scared that the factory might turn everyone into Christians. In Thachanakkara there are stories about how the followers of the "Nazarene" (34) started to increase just two villages away, in Angamaly, running new businesses that impacted other people.

In other such instances where multiple religions and castes coexist, the dominant power structure controls the narrative of the marginalized by dividing them and alienating them based on what differences they showcase, the differences that can be adversarial to the center. Thus, as Edward Soja says, hegemonic power takes away the "power of being different" (41) from the subject group, so it can no longer help them in the path of empowerment or creating an alternative system. The debate between the center and the periphery becomes important here once again. Even though the writers portray the people who are pushed to the periphery, they do not take away their "power of being different," instead, they illuminate it. This is possible only because, in literary cartography, they are the center that makes the map. While including a historical representation of the discrimination, they also assign new spaces for the "different," bringing them closer to the center.

Power and Space in Post-Independent Kerala

In the study of imagined spaces in Malayalam literature, geography gives further meaning to spatial histories. Establishing that space within a known history is the hard part. Furthermore, these narratives are often born from the conflict between power and space, especially because they are texts from colonized countries with various discriminatory practices such as class, caste, religion, etc. All powers and contexts are constructed by knowledge, and it is vital to know even the niche aspects of a bigger problem before writing a grand narrative about it (Chen 886). Hence, the writers of these texts know that it is crucial to understand the multiple voices of history and not follow a single one. They also understand that space is the only social construction that can help people find out different histories.

The problem with narratives that follow histories already written is that they choose spaces that already exist in the power narrative and write with a conclusion preset by centers of power. Secondary historical sources also follow the same problematic process as they take off from an already-written narrative. If a work is started with such a source as the background, then the conclusions and events would have already been determined. Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of "chronotope" (425) becomes essential when analyzing the connection between an imagined place and history. Among the many different chronotopes, a historical chronotope presents a location that can appear exotic for those not exposed to it and is recognizable to people who have had similar experiences. Thus, through historical chronotopes in regional languages, the writers re-introduce indigenous identities lost in dominant languages' narratives.

It is also a fact that indigenous identities find their existence within limits. A discussion that Clair Wills begins in her article "A Furnace and the Life of the Dead" (2000) becomes pertinent in this study. She debates about the boundaries of imagined spaces that house indigenous identities, about where the fiction ends and the real begins (271). The boundaries are where the center and the margin clash and sometimes interlink to produce something both own. These boundaries often become an inclusive globalized space where both are acknowledged. In the chosen Malayalam novels, this globalized space emerges with the advent of industrialization, which connects people from imagined spaces to the 'real world' outside their natural boundaries. The coming of the Aluminium company named FACT in Eloor, the nearby village on the banks of the river Periyar, is a massive event for the people of Thachanakkara. Many people from the village get their jobs there.

Similarly, Tata Company, Pierce Leslie and Company, Cochin Port, and the new oil companies on the opposite banks of Lanthan Bathery create new jobs for the island's people. Thus, a new sect of the population is acquainted with the 'new world' and brings news about the outside world into the fictional ones. It can be directly linked with the concept that Edward Soja calls "Thirdspace" (2), where the real and the fictional spaces combine. This is one of the critical processes in hermeneutics. The clues and proofs attained through analyzing the material and the metaphoric places, the relation between power and representation, and the different methods of resistance towards them can thus be studied. This would then lead to a new avenue known as critical literary geography.

As Bertrand Westphal sees it, heterotopia also becomes a pertinent idea for analyzing such spaces. He sees it as where a subject withdraws from the public space and enjoys, at his leisure, a place outside of common law that resists it (153). This place is individual as well as social at the same time. Since overarching power systems are always located at the center of a space, these heterotopias often move to the margins, where they can exert their systems since the variety of these 'marginalized' heterotopias resists totalizing powers that need to see everything reduced to a singularity. When being the same is what the center of power requires, these imagined spaces present various versions of possible worlds. In this light, it becomes interesting to note that all typical structures of power and institutions alien to the Malayali culture lie outside the imagined spaces in the chosen texts, like courts, police stations, and doctors of English medicine. In Khasak, police officers come from the outside world, the city of Palghat,

arrest criminals, and take them back. Similar is the case of Lanthan Bathery, where the Rammohan Palace and the High Court, institutions of the real world powers, are located on the other side of the Eastern River. The education system implemented by the British is also alien to these places. Khasak has an upper primary school in a nearby village, but the Mullah, who teaches its Muslim children, is sure his students would not walk two miles just to learn English and arithmetic.

Meanwhile, to get to the real bustling world, the people of Thachanakkara must cross the Ghat at Kamari River and go to Aluva town. The river blocks the interaction between the hegemonic powers of the real world and the people of Thachanakkara. The history of how a bridge connecting the two later came to be, connecting the two lands, is also mentioned in the novel: "Rani Sethulakshmi Bai was ruling as the regent, as Chithira Tirunal Balarama Varma was still a minor. When Bala Rama Varma would ascend to the throne, the wave-shaped Marthandavarma Bridge would appear" (Chandran 213).

Local History Vs. National History

The selected Malayalam novels showcase the different aspects of the culture they are born from and give a "phenomenology of historical space which carefully differentiates each historical moment" (Hirschkop 37). While Kant distinguishes history and geography as two very different things, Bakhtin presents the intersections and the multiple meanings made out of them. He also talks about the "real" and the "literary" worlds portrayed in history and literature, respectively. He says the boundaries between the two are not fixed and can be permeated (13). The real and the literary are always related and interact. The real world inspires the fictional, and most writers base them on the places they are familiar with. The fictional world provides a space to think about various issues in the real world. The dialogue between the two happens in a developing world, with consideration to the historical world that is constantly changing. The writers have also given attention to the minor differences and interrelations, and they, too, are portrayed with clarity. Such moments narrated in the texts are the visit of Mahatma Gandhi and the arrival of Communism.

Many narratives have been written about the freedom movement in India, and one has been considered the standard by the dominant power structures. A lot of regional struggles for the exact cause have been thus forgotten. In the imagined spaces created in the novels of regional languages, the national framework about what happened is shattered and is replaced with regional stories. An alternative history is thus created, unwilling to succumb to dominant narratives. One such event is that of Mahatma Gandhi visiting Narayanaguru, the low caste leader of the Reformation movement in Kerala, who fought against discrimination, which has been recorded as a celebrated event in the history of Kerala. Nevertheless, how people see it is entirely different. In Thachanakkara, the Nairs (the people of higher caste) are disappointed that such a great national hero would visit someone from a lower caste. The discriminatory practices are thus shown in full magnitude. The literature, therefore, validates the actual event by also including the experience of the natives. The novel also talks about the Gandhi-Pitt pact, a treaty between the Indians and the British that was signed in the adjacent town of Thachanakkara. Since the people of the imagined spaces have reduced their knowledge about the world to the boundaries of their land, the ignorance that is caused as a result can be seen in how the "Gandhi-Pitt Pact" is reduced to "Gandhi pickpocket," (29) a news item that somebody created about the robbing of the Mahatma. How a national event does not reach every corner of the country in all its importance is thus illustrated.

Another considerable event in Kerala was the arrival of the Communist party, an instance in which the real and the fictional interact in the imagined villages of the selected texts. Even though Kerala has been identified as one of the only two states to embrace the movement, it is in the regional works that the effects of this history on ordinary people can be read. In Khasak, people observe Lenin's birth anniversary on the 21st of January. The first procession that the village ever witnessed was also a Communist march.

The writer Vijayan also details the enmity towards the party among the people. He writes, "Muslim trade unionists visited Attar and told him these processions were evil and their slogans Satanic. The right-wing Congressmen had an even scary story. They said the Russians were coming. Slogans ripped the peace: Anglo-American exploitation Muradabad!" (Vijayan 112). He even talks about how the predominant religion of Khasak was incorporated into these processions, with people taking part in them carrying both the Quran and the portrait of Stalin, a joke for those who do not understand the culture of the village. Meanwhile, the Communist party is under a ban during the birth of the protagonist of the novel *Litanies of the Dutch Battery*. The Communist leaders from Kochi hide from authorities in the houses of the daily wage laborers living on the island. The island turned into a haven for Communists who were issued warrants in Travancore at a time before the princely state joined the Union of India, as the island was part of the new country and followed the Indian penal code that did not allow capital punishment. Furthermore, the first room on the first floor of Malacca house, one of the important buildings on the island, belongs to DYF, the Democratic Youth Federation, the youth wing of the Communist party. The narrator also talks about how the Communist government handles the rare famines of Kerala through the acts of DYF in Malacca House. In such accounts, the history of the government introducing macaroni in the form of grains and circulating it, which DYF members cook and serve for free, is detailed. Thus, regional writers from Kerala portray how geography influences social and political events.

Conclusions

Identifying imagined places as resistance narratives becomes relevant when the concepts of abstract and differential spaces are considered. While abstract spaces are related to power structures, differential ones have enabled platforms for threats and opportunities to rebel against the predominant spatial, social, and cultural orders. In most cases, the abstract spaces try to bring back the differential spaces into their folds by either giving recognition or using force before the latter transgresses. The space in maps created for Kerala by foreign and Indian authorities is thus abstract. Hence, there is always tension between the two regarding the power that can be exerted over the other. The differential spaces exhibit a dual character. They show how being different from the abstract spaces controls them as well as enables them to resist, both at the same time. The imagined spaces created by authors thus become differential. While history and temporality have played a considerable role in the writing and analysis of texts of significant movements such as modernism and realism, the role that space has to play in such a situation has only recently come into the purview of academics. Hence, the imagined spaces are a bricolage of many contexts the minority communities have had to go through, including those of history, cartography, geography, and politics. The texts thus become products of events and experiences drawn from history for that particular culture based on its memory.

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Unalterable Pasts and Transformative Futures: Memory, Trauma, and the Temporal Boundaries of Identity in Toshikazu Kawaguchi's "The Lovers."

Abstract: This paper explores trauma, memory, and time in Toshikazu Kawaguchi's "The Lovers" (2019) from *Before the Coffee Gets Cold*, focusing on their role in shaping identity. Using speculative fiction, Kawaguchi follows Fumiko Kiyokawa, a woman dealing with the trauma of a sudden breakup, to show how trauma alters the perception of time. Central motifs like a cooling cup of coffee and a time-traveling café symbolize the disruption of linear time, illustrating how trauma traps people in a continuous present where past, present, and future blend. Fumiko's attempt to revisit a key moment with her ex-boyfriend highlights the futility of changing the past for healing, emphasizing that while the past cannot be changed, its emotional impact can be reinterpreted. This paper argues that Kawaguchi challenges the Western view of time as linear by presenting a framework where emotional and psychological engagements with time complicate this perspective. The conclusion suggests that despite the unchangeable nature of past events, new insights can transform their significance, offering a path to emotional closure and a redefined sense of self, deepening our understanding of how trauma distorts time.

Keywords: trauma, memory, temporality, identity, Toshikazu Kawaguchi.

Introduction

Toshikazu Kawaguchi's story "The Lovers," from *Before the Coffee Gets Cold*, delves into trauma, memory, and time in speculative fiction. Here, the protagonist Fumiko grapples with her past, as a trauma of untimely and shocking breakup disrupts the linear sense of time. The story utilizes a cooling cup of coffee and a time-traveling café to show how individuals remain trapped in a present where the past constantly intrudes. I examine the relationship between trauma and time in Kawaguchi's work, exploring how the narrative structure and symbols reflect memory and identity post-trauma.

Fumiko Kiyokawa's heartbreak starts when her boyfriend Goro Katada unexpectedly announces that he is moving to America, and hence a breakup, during a conversation in a basement café. Fumiko was hoping for a marriage proposal and, although self-sufficient and successful in her career, she is deeply affected by the breakup and gets stuck in unresolved feelings. The café Funiculi Funicula is rumored to allow time travel; this becomes her hope to alter the past and save the relationship. But the café's staff, Hirai and Kazu, explain strict rules: one can meet only those who have been to the café, one cannot change the present by altering the past, and one is bound to one's time-traveling seat with a time limit. Kazu explains that time travel begins when warm coffee is poured, warning Fumiko to drink it before it cools or she risks becoming a ghost, like the café's woman dressed in white, herself. Fumiko starts reflecting on her first meeting with Goro during a project two years ago, where his competence impressed her, and she gradually steels herself for the present challenge. In the time-travel, she returns to their last meeting in the café, but this time Goro reveals his insecurities and promises to return in three years, leaving Fumiko conflicted but resigned. Once back in the present after the dream sequence, she realizes she has already traveled back a week. She asks Kazu about changing the future and learns a vital fact: while the present

remains the same, the future is hers to shape. Leaving the café, Fumiko feels a renewed sense of hope, ready to face what lies ahead.

Kawaguchi's story questions traditional views of time, especially the Western idea of time as linear and unchangeable. Time travel in "The Lovers" is not just a fantasy element; it symbolizes the human desire to make peace with the past and confront its unchangeable nature. The narrative suggests that time is subjective and flexible, shaped by one's emotions and mental state. My analysis goes beyond literary critique, touching on trauma studies and cognitive psychology. I explore how narrative and memory shape identity and offer the potential for emotional change.

Temporal Disruptions and the Lived Experience of Trauma

The perception of time shifts fundamentally after trauma. It manifests either as a slow-motion effect where each moment is scrutinized to avoid a repeat of the traumatic event, or as a rapid acceleration pushing the trauma behind in an effort to move on. In her analysis, trauma theorist Cathy Caruth asserts that this altered perception is rooted in a "breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world" (*Unclaimed Experience* 4). Unlike physical wounds, this psychological injury does not heal simply; it arises from traumatic experiences that happen "too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known," leading to a delayed awareness that manifests when it "imposes itself again, repeatedly" through nightmares or repetitive actions (*Unclaimed Experience* 4). It is clear that the trauma's shock lies less in how intense the event was and more in the mind's inability to process it at the time. This "lack of preparedness" becomes the foundation for its "repetition," as the survivor seeks to master what was "never fully grasped in the first place" (*Unclaimed Experience* 62). Likewise, this temporal disruption forces the individual to confront events that resist closure. This makes the act of surviving feel like an endless haunting re-living of the past. I explore how this temporal disjunction creates a situation where the past invades the present and the future seems out of reach. In Toshikazu Kawaguchi's story "The Lovers," these distortions emerge in Fumiko's ritual of drinking hot coffee. This ritual symbolizes her attempt to relive and scrutinize the moment of her painful breakup with Goro, with the cooling coffee marking the limits of her control over time and memory. I examine this event as a traumatic experience to show how trauma reshapes one's perception of the temporal and the life narrative by juxtaposing the two.

Trauma disrupts the conventional sequencing of time (Raveendran 47, 83), resulting in a non-linear experience where past, present, and future merge into a chaotic temporal continuum (Terr 644), which suggests that trauma interrupts the normal sequence of time, creating a disorder where these temporal elements intermingle (Terr 644, 647). For instance, traumas can make events feel prolonged or as if they are happening in slow motion (Terr 642-643). This phenomenon is seen in Fumiko's obsession with her coffee cooling down, which serves as a metaphor for temporal dissipation. The coffee's initial warmth symbolizes the present moment that Fumiko desperately tries to hold onto, but as it cools, it represents lost time and the fading of her relationship with Goro. Her apprehension that the coffee will become cold before she finishes drinking it mirrors her anxiety that the opportunity to amend her past errors with Goro will elude her grasp before she can even seize it.

Fumiko's fixation on the cooling coffee acts as a temporal disorientation where the past intrudes on the present, stifling any future aspirations (Brison 96). The temperature of the coffee is not just a sensory detail; it is symbolic of Fumiko's emotional state, with time slipping away like the cooling coffee. Moreover, her time-traveling experience in the café substitutes for a microcosm of trauma's broader effects on time perception. As she prepares to drink the coffee and revisit the past, she is overwhelmed by anxiety, which distorts her sense of reality:

> Just as Fumiko noticed the shimmering steam rising from the coffee that filled the cup, everything around the table also began to curl up and become indistinguishable from the swirling vapour. She began to feel fear and closed her eyes. The sensation that she was shimmering and becoming distorted, like the rising steam, became even more powerful. She clenched her fists tighter. If this continues, I won't find myself in the present or past; I'll simply vanish in a wisp of smoke. (Kawaguchi 45)

The steam emanating from the coffee intermingles with her psychical environment, causing a blurring of the delineation between past and present. Here I conceptualize time as a web of physical, psychological, and emotional threads, exemplified in the case of Fumiko, whose experience starkly illustrates this multidimensional phenomenon. Following psychic trauma, disorders of time sequencing may manifest as "condensations of events into simultaneity," "time-skew," "retrospective significances (including omens)," or "a sense of prediction," leading to significant distortions of reality (Terr 644). Fumiko's physical presence in the past contrasts with her psychological attachment to the present, a situation that reflects how trauma distorts time, where events from different times seem to occur simultaneously. A disruption in the sense of time is exposed as Fumiko physically asserts her presence; so, the disorientation of her traumatized psyche also becomes evident. This dislocation is the upshot of a traumatic fracture in her temporal reality, leaving her struggling to find a stable anchor in the temporal plane.

Fumiko's breakup with Goro represents trauma that endures temporally, both in its persistence and its psychological reverberations. Research on trauma indicates that its effects are not restricted to the moment of the initial event but are extended by the recurrent and intense aftershocks (Abrutyn 249). While Seth Abrutyn's research primarily focuses on collective trauma—where communities experience "shocks" with lasting effects—certain elements of this model apply to individual trauma as well. Fumiko's experience highlights that the breakup is not merely a single event; it represents an ongoing psychological struggle. Each time she returns to the café or takes a sip of her coffee, memories of her lost relationship resurface, creating a cycle of emotional aftershocks. This continual re-experiencing of her breakup, along with her symbolic choice to "travel back" and confront it, illustrates how personal trauma can stretch across time, much like collective trauma. What is interesting here is how "the number, frequency, and spacing of shocks" shape Fumiko's psyche (Abrutyn 249). Each reminder, particularly the bitter taste of her coffee, pulls her into a temporal loop where the past and present intertwine, trapping her in unresolved anguish. Although individual trauma may not ripple through a larger collective identity as social trauma does, it disrupts the individual's sense of time and continuity, complicating the healing journey. Ultimately, while Fumiko's trauma remains a deeply personal experience, her story reveals that the persistence and intensity of trauma—whether individual or collective—can profoundly influence the experience of time and memory.

In this context, I theorize, the Fumiko-Goro breakup can indeed be characterized as a traumatic experience. The necessity for significant identity reconstruction due to trauma's persistent and recurrent nature (Abrutyn 248, 249) is obvious in Fumiko's ongoing struggle to move past the emotional intensity of the premature separation between her and Goro. The café grows into a symbolic locus of collective memory, where the temporal boundaries of past and present converge, allowing characters to confront and reconcile their traumatic experiences within a liminal space. This space transforms the café into a site of memory where personal narratives are preserved and reinterpreted through shared experiences. Indeed, Kazu's warning to Fumiko that "You can't meet people who haven't visited this café" (Kawaguchi 22) reflects how such spaces often derive significance from those directly connected to the events, turning the café into a heritage-like space (Castro-Fernández et al. 2), where personal and collective memories are preserved and reinterpreted within the bounds of shared experience. Although the café visitors have not necessarily endured the same traumatic events, their shared connection to the café creates a unique collective through which their individual experiences intersect. The café serves as a "collective" not

because the visitors share identical traumas, but because it provides a shared space where each person's unresolved past can be acknowledged, reflected upon, and reinterpreted. This liminal setting allows the café's visitors—both those with personal trauma and those accompanying others—to participate in a form of communal healing, where individual memories are both isolated and interconnected, fostering a symbolic kinship among them. Consequently, the café itself, as a repository of "heritage-like" experiences, enables a community to form around the theme of memory and reconciliation, with each visitor contributing to the shared narrative by revisiting and reshaping their own past alongside others. Fumiko's journey into the past represents a bid to reconstitute her personal narrative and to reassert a semblance of agency over the events that have defined her existence. Nevertheless, I think her experience in the café reveals that reclaiming her past is not just about looking back. The trauma she has faced seems to have fundamentally altered her sense of temporal progression, making it difficult for her to fully engage with the present or to envisage a future unblemished by past wounds. I interpret the ostensibly banal act of consuming coffee as a ritualistic engagement with her trauma—an instance where temporality, emotion, and recollection intersect, accordingly, the past coexists freely with the present. The impact of trauma on her sense of time is clear in several aspects of her life. Her continued emotional distress from the sudden breakup with Goro, her disorientation in the café, and her fixation on the coffee's temperature all highlight how trauma skews her perception of the present. To me, this disruption in temporal coherence transcends mere narrative technique, where time ceases to progress linearly and instead transforms into a chaotic confluence of past, present, and future.

Temporal Trauma and the Illusion of Healing

Time, trauma, and memory form a crucial part of human experience, and I have already discussed that they blur the temporal boundaries of the individuals' past while shaping their present and future identities. The experience of trauma manifests as a rupture in the succession of moments, where the past and present become both separated and yet inextricably linked, leading to a haunting untimeliness that lingers even when the traumatic event is supposedly over (Chambers 191; O'Brien 213). It causes an injury to existing mental frameworks and shakes fundamental psychological mechanisms, shattering basic assumptions about oneself and the world. This results in a loss of a coherent sense of reality, place, space, and time (Brewin 5). Trauma separates the past from the present and blocks future vision, but survivors often manage to rebuild their identities by moving from being objects of the perpetrator's actions to becoming authors of their own narratives (Brison 68). Traumatic experience disrupts the clockwork mechanism of time, trapping the individual in an everlasting present where past and future lose their meaning. The emotional "valence" of memories anchors individuals to their pasts, creating a "collective and personal identity" that is as much a product of longing and loss as it is of shared experiences (Keszei 806). Kawaguchi's story aligns with the conceptual framework posited by Ronnie Janoff-Bulman: the "shattering of fundamental assumptions produces a state of both loss and disintegration; the known, comforting old assumptive world is gone, and a new one must be constructed" (80). Gripped by unresolved trauma, characters like Fumiko attempt, albeit unsuccessfully, to return to their pasts, hoping to mend their fractured present by altering past events. "The Lovers" illustrates the futility of this effort: even when the past is revisited, it remains resistant to change, trapping the characters in an ongoing cycle of trauma and psychological breakdown.

In the aftermath of a traumatic event, the conventional temporal structure of time becomes disordered and unmoored. Trauma resists integration into a cohesive self-narrative, creating what Wendy O'Brien characterizes as "a list of nows" (213), instead of a continuous timeline comprising past, present, and future. Consequently, the survivor becomes "stuck in the time of trauma" (O'Brien 213), caught in an unchanging present as the traumatic event continues re-emerging through flashbacks or intrusive

memories. Time effectively stops in the story as Fumiko personifies this temporal entrapment through her obsessive yearning to return to the past and reconcile with her estranged boyfriend Goro. I reason that her focus on revisiting the past is a way to address her current suffering, since it is already established that trauma can distort one's sense of time. For her, the past becomes the only avenue for finding a resolution, overshadowing the present and the future. Trauma affects how time is perceived, which often creates the impression that going back to the past and altering it is the sole path to resolution.

Memories, especially those imbued with strong emotions, become the foundation of both individual and collective identity. Fumiko's longing to return to a time before her relationship with Goro ended reveals her desire to revisit the past. This longing is driven by the emotional weight of her memories. Her identity is linked to her memories of Goro, and the pain of their unresolved separation compels her to seek solace in the past, even as she is warned that doing so will not change the present. Because the emotional significance of memories directs how they are recalled and influences the individual's sense of continuity and belonging (Keszei 810), Fumiko's journey to the past, then, is not merely an attempt to alter a single event but rather a desperate effort to reclaim a lost sense of self and restore the emotional equilibrium that was disrupted by her traumatic experience.

Kawaguchi further complicates the relationship between trauma, memory, and time by introducing the concept of a time-traveling café where patrons can return to the past, albeit under strict and ultimately disheartening conditions. The story explores the futility of attempting to change the past. Fumiko has convinced herself that she can mend her relationship with Goro by returning to the moment before he left for America, but is confronted with the harsh truth from Kazu: "no matter how hard you try, the present won't change" (Kawaguchi 12). This revelation shatters her illusion that revisiting the past could heal her trauma. The story depicts time travel as a mechanism that preserves the emotional weight of memories while preventing any alteration of the past. Ross Chambers's concept of "untimeliness"—the breakdown of conventional temporal categories that separate trauma from its aftermath, leading to a disorienting experience where past trauma constantly invades the present, making it hard to distinguish between having survived trauma and continuing to survive it (xxiii)—is reflected in the café's rules. I analyze this paradox mirroring the nature of trauma, where the past persistently intrudes upon the present while remaining frustratingly out of the individual's control. Kawaguchi portrays characters in *Before the Coffee Gets Cold*, including Fumiko who, driven by love, regret, and longing, seeks to return to moments of emotional significance in their lives, only to find that these memories, while vivid and powerful, cannot actually be altered.

Temporal Directionality and Its Disruption

The idea that temporal progression is unidirectional—from past to future, and irreversible, has been central to Western metaphysics and natural science. Marie-Laure Ryan asserts that time cannot be imagined in reverse (142, 145). This perception of time as a fixed trajectory is reinforced by both physical laws and human cognition, which distinguish the past and the future as a realm of memory and a domain of potentiality, respectively. But some narratives and speculative fiction, like Kawaguchi's work, challenge this understanding by creating worlds where time is malleable and can be manipulated.

Complexities are involved in representing time that deviates from its conventional, forward-moving trajectory. There is a difference between how events are presented in a narrative—the temporal structure, and the actual sequence of events within the story—the temporal framework. Reversed time narratives complicate this structure by presenting a world where events unfold in a temporally inverted order (Ryan 147), challenging the very notion of time as a linear and irreversible progression. "The Lovers" invites readers to reconsider the ontological status of time and questions whether the future is indeed fixed or if it can be altered through temporal manipulation. It creates a space where past, present, and future

collapse into a continuous loop of unresolved emotional experience, mirroring the story's temporal dislocation with the cyclical nature of Fumiko's traumatic memory. This engagement with the psychological dimensions of trauma not only forces a confrontation with the disruptions of linear progression but also disrupts the linear progression itself.

This is consistent with Felix Ringel's concept of "future-tricking," a method of manipulating the future rather than merely representing it. He argues that this reflects a belief in the changeability of the future, despite its epistemological constraints (8-9). People's understanding of the future is influenced by current realities and can be tinged with optimism or pessimism. I wish to argue here that trying to influence future events adds a layer of metaphysical complexity, as it involves making certain outcomes more likely or affecting the timing of events. This goes beyond simple representation and involves practices that can either create new realities or maintain existing ones. Such practices affect temporal processes by altering rhythms and structures that coordinate social life, influencing how future events unfold. Kawaguchi's tale connects with this idea by presenting a time-travel narrative that, while adhering to the rule of temporal irreversibility in its outcomes, nonetheless, permits the characters to experience past moments anew. Funiculi Funicula café, the novel's setting, is where this temporal anomaly occurs. Fumiko learns that the café allows its patrons to travel back in time under a strict set of conditions: they can only meet people who have previously visited the café, and crucially, "there is nothing [they] can do while in the past that will change the present" (Kawaguchi 13-14). This rule, which dictates the immutability of the present despite temporal reversals, reinforces the conventional view of time's fixed directionality—either theoretically (Gefter n.p., Ryan 142), or experientially (Siegel n.p.). Once the past happens, it becomes immutable; nothing done during the time trip can alter the sequence of events. The past, I hence conclude, becomes a domain of knowledge and memory that resists alteration, in spite of the possibility of revisiting it. On the other hand, the future remains a realm of speculation and potential, untouched by the temporal journey to the past.

Yet, Kawaguchi complicates this temporal framework by imbuing the act of time travel within the narrative. While characters like Fumiko Kiyokawa are warned that they cannot alter the past's factual content, their journeys back in time allow them to gain new insights, resolve emotional conflicts, and achieve a sense of closure that was previously unattainable. This wholly challenges the purely physical conception of time as an objective, linear progression and introduces a more subjective, experiential dimension of time. It helps Fumiko understand her place in time better and allows her to make peace with her past while accepting that the future is unchangeable. Kawaguchi deepens Fumiko's understanding of time by acknowledging that the past cannot be altered. But he also challenges the rigid temporal boundaries by letting her interact with her past in ways that are psychologically and emotionally transformative.

The Temporal Dimensions of Trauma and Dream

The intertwining of time, trauma, and perception in "The Lovers" explores how trauma shapes, distorts, and often traps individuals within fragmented temporal experiences. In the café, where time travel becomes possible, Fumiko's trauma disrupts her temporal perspective, raising questions about whether her journey back is literal or a psychological cycle, where she revisits rather than alters her past. This uncertainty reflects the broader trauma-induced experience, where time itself appears malleable, as if altered by the wounded psyche's attempts to reconcile with what has been lost. The narrative's blurred boundaries between reality and dream suggest how trauma affects linear time, often casting individuals into loops of re-experiencing rather than progressing. Lenore Terr's concept of time condensation in trauma provides insight into this: she observes that trauma blends "current concerns" and "long-past unconscious wishes," merging different temporal layers (647). In Fumiko's case, the café's isolation from

the outside world—"As it was a basement café, they had no way of knowing what it was like inside" (Kawaguchi 6)—creates a dream-like space where time condenses and reality is suspended, symbolizing her internal confrontation with unresolved emotions about Goro. Thus, Fumiko's return to the past functions not merely as a time travel event but as an expression of her struggle to harmonise her present self with past memories.

Interestingly, the repetitive environment of the café, with "the same faces" continually appearing, echoes the repetitive nature of trauma, as if her mind, caught in a loop, is unable to move forward (Kawaguchi 10). Rather than allowing her to rewrite the past, the café seems to trap Fumiko within a cycle of internal conflict, where her past haunts the present, and future growth remains uncertain. This experience illustrates how traumatic memories can feel like they are happening 'now,' where time is less linear and more fractured by emotional stasis. The condensation of time within the café reflects how trauma collapses temporal boundaries, fusing past with present and hindering the flow of new memories. Peter Hartocollis describes temporality as deeply intertwined with one's emotional state, in which the present self frequently navigates past or imagined futures, attempting to find coherence in experience (372-373). This dynamic appears when Fumiko falls asleep, only to find herself suddenly displaced in time: "Fumiko had been asleep for a while now. Suddenly, the woman in the dress slammed shut the book she was reading and sighed" (Kawaguchi 40). The abrupt shift here dissolves the boundary between dream and reality, positioning Fumiko's time travel as a way to re-examine, rather than erase, her trauma.

In this context, cyclical temporality within Japanese culture becomes pivotal. Shimizu and Noro challenge the linear progressivism often associated with Western notions of time by illustrating a cyclical conception that emphasizes the continuity of personal and social identities, arguing that the cyclical temporality is inherently "static and orderly, where the present is often found in the past" (378). This framework posits that wisdom and virtue derive not solely from abstract reasoning but from experiences repeated across time; naturally, "inherited knowledge or personal experience" plays a crucial role in understanding one's identity (Shimizu and Noro 378). Fumiko's experiences within the café exemplify this cyclical approach as she engages in a continuous dialogue with her memories of Goro. The idea that her identity comes from her recollections makes closure seem less important. As "the present is often found in the past," Fumiko's journey reinforces a culturally resonant process of healing through the revisitation of unresolved emotions (Shimizu and Noro 382). The café, therefore, is not merely a physical setting; it becomes a space where Fumiko experiences her past in a multi-layered fashion, revealing that "time follows a cyclical/circular structure of temporality" (Ek 50). The narrative encapsulates a Japanese belief that personal growth is achieved through embracing one's past rather than distancing oneself from it, thus reaffirming Fumiko's identity within a framework that values relational connections over conventional resolutions.

Fumiko's journey illustrates the Japanese philosophy that time is not just a straight line but rather a web where past and future "are intertwined" within both physical and metaphysical realities (Ek 60). Now, it becomes clear that her past is always present in her current reality, especially when she relives her memories. This experience mirrors Nishida Kitarō's idea of time as a circular, spiral path (qtd. in Ek 60). This cyclical view of time, much like the "passing and turning of seasons," helps her navigate her emotions, noting that her experiences form an ongoing cycle rather than a single, linear story (Ek 60). By delving into her memories, Fumiko engages in a kind of reflection that aligns with the Japanese perspective, where ethical actions arise from context rather than fixed rules. In this light, the narrative highlights that "virtue exists only in virtuous minds" (Shimizu and Noro 377), which suggests that Fumiko's bond with Goro remains intact through her repeated recollections. Consequently, the café becomes a vibrant space for her to explore herself in relation to their shared past, capturing the cyclical essence of memory and identity that defines Japanese temporality.

In another sense, Fumiko's experience in the café resonates with the concept of transference, where present emotions inform and reshape one's perception of the past. Hans W. Loewald notes that the past is reconfigured by the mind without actually altering the events that took place (408), which mirrors Fumiko's journey: although motivated by a desire to reconnect with Goro, her journey ultimately becomes about reconciling her past and present selves. Her experiences seem to affirm that time travel serves as a mechanism for reliving and perhaps understanding one's trauma, though it cannot entirely rewrite the past. Time in this context becomes a space of negotiation between mind and body, where each interprets the other through the language of memory. In this way, Fumiko's repeated attempt to "revisit" Goro can be understood as a psychic defence mechanism—a need to regain control over a body still haunted by the trauma's emotional scars. By returning to the past, she confronts her unresolved grief, but the persistence of her trauma reminds us that temporal shifts alone cannot mend the emotional rift. Rather, the café emphasizes how, in cases of deep-seated trauma, true healing must occur internally.

Fumiko's journey resembles what John Krystal calls "traumatic reenactment," where unresolved memories re-emerge as flashbacks that resist conscious change (qtd. in Caruth, "Introduction" 152). Fumiko's inability to alter the past, despite her emotional engagement, suggests that trauma locks one into cycles of recall without resolution, as Caruth describes the precision of traumatic memory encoding, where recollections feel real yet remain detached from understanding ("Introduction" 152). The persistent sights, smells, and sensations in the café—the coffee aroma and familiar faces—highlight how her journey remains only partially integrated into her conscious self, more like a "dreamlike sensation" (Kawaguchi 55) than an accessible memory. Fumiko's unresolved breakup with Goro continues to haunt her, with the memory existing in a liminal space where, as Caruth notes, trauma "has no place" in either the past or present ("Introduction" 153). This impossibility of fully integrating her trauma into conscious awareness is why time travel offers little closure; she remains bound to her memories without gaining the understanding needed to move forward. The café, thus, becomes a place where time and trauma intersect, highlighting the difficulty—and perhaps impossibility—of rewriting personal history through temporal shifts alone.

The Fallacy of Temporal Reconfiguration in Trauma

In "The Lovers," time travel serves as a metaphor for the desires and limitations of those dealing with trauma. Fumiko, still affected by her breakup with Goro, represents someone yearning to return to a pivotal moment in hopes that changing it could reshape the present. Yet, the café's rule—that actions taken in the past cannot alter the present—exposes the futility of this desire. Here, time travel resembles a psychological fixation on the impossible, highlighting the impulse to "mentally time travel" or "MTT" (Trakas n.p.), an internal revisitation that trauma often compels. Unlike mere recall, MTT allows individuals to project themselves backward to re-experience events, replaying them with a renewed awareness that combines past emotions with present understanding.

Trauma frequently drives individuals to mentally revisit painful moments, yearning to alter them and alleviate current suffering. Fumiko's imagined return to a critical juncture with Goro—the moment he announced his departure—reflects a common trauma response: the desire to say the things left unsaid or act differently to avoid later pain. Yet the café's rule enforces an inevitable truth: trauma, once experienced, is beyond alteration. I view this as a reminder that time, once woven, cannot be unraveled. Even when Fumiko tries to influence her past, she finds herself trapped within the dynamics that led to the original outcome. This reflects the experience of many trauma survivors who, no matter how deeply they wish, cannot change the events that shape their current realities. There is a clear distinction between actual time travel, a physical return to the past, and mental time travel, a psychological journey through memory (Trakas n.p.). In the former, the individual engages with a different time as though it is distinct. In

the latter, the journey exists only in the mind. While the café's time travel blurs these lines, it ultimately functions as a form of MTT, where the journey is less about changing the past than processing internal pain. This is underscored by the café's rule, which confirms that, though Fumiko seems to revisit the past physically, the experience is ultimately an internal confrontation with unresolved emotions, not an opportunity to alter external reality.

Yaeko Hirai, a regular patron at the café, observes to Fumiko, "It's been a long time since we've seen a customer like you—someone totally set in your delusion of wanting to go back to the past" (Kawaguchi 15). This remark posits the friction between desire and reality, which is critical to understanding trauma. The unchangeable nature of time directly clashes with the human urge to rewrite the past, especially for those coping with trauma. Fumiko's insistence on using the café's time-travel ritual, despite warnings and the known limits of what it can achieve, illuminates her struggle to face reality. Her resolve reflects a common psychological tendency where individuals cling to impossibilities to ease their pain. More interesting is Fumiko's encounter with the ghostly woman in the white dress, who complicates the time-travel experience by confronting Fumiko's disbelief. Fumiko, wavering between disbelief and denial of the ghost's nature, personifies how trauma distorts one's perception. Rather than accept the "ghost" as real, she interprets it as a ploy to deter customers, subtly recognizing her own delusory intentions. Ultimately, her actions point to the deep human need to believe in rewriting the past, however illusory that may be. Like others, Fumiko also clings to this belief and pursues time travel to confront her pain without truly resolving it. Revisiting the past may offer a chance to reframe trauma but it cannot bring about the closure she—and perhaps all humans—seek. Instead, it reinforces the limits of change, underlining the necessity of accepting the present reality, even though this acceptance is fraught with inner conflict.

The ability for self-reflectiveness through narrative thinking connects the telling of past events to the speaker's and listener's concerns about their present and future lives (Ochs and Capps 25), allowing individuals to view their past or future self as a distinct entity and thus occupy the roles of both narrator and audience in their own life story (Goldie 41-42). This duality permits a form of internal dialogue where one's current self can evaluate, judge, or even converse with the self that existed in the past or will exist in the future (Goldie 42). A mechanism to systematize the often tumultuous flux of life events is provided by the faculty of narrative cognition which empowers individuals to impose coherence upon their experiences. Fumiko's temporal excursion to her breakup with Goro presents how narrative thinking enables individuals to reflect on their past and future selves; here, she is not merely revisiting a past moment but is engaged in a sophisticated self-reflective narrative, wherein her present self assumes the role of an observer to her former actions and decisions. She oscillates between reproaching her former self for failing to articulate her authentic emotions and endeavoring to rationalize her past behaviors. Goldie's notion that "one is at the same time both actor and spectator, both narrator and audience, and both agent and judge" (42) is clearly echoed in Fumiko's experience. She revisits the past with the intention of changing it, but instead, finds herself constrained by the very narrative she originally lived out. Notwithstanding her cognizance of the appropriate verbal or behavioral responses, this incapacity to modify past events accentuates the inherent constraints of narrative thinking in effectuating tangible transformation. The unarticulated dialogue between Fumiko's past and present-within-past selves, particularly in the presence of her lover Goro during both instances, accentuates the intrinsic tension between the aspiration to revise one's narrative and the unalterable veracity of past occurrences. I have here examined the Fumiko-Goro conversation, following Fumiko's return to the past, and it confirms the same:

> 'I know how much your work means to you. I don't necessarily mind if you go to America. I won't stand in the way.'

(*I thought we were going to be together for ever.*)
'But, at least...'
(*Was it only me thinking that?*)
'I wanted you to discuss it with me. You know, it's pretty despicable just deciding without talking about it...'
(*I really, truly...*)
'That's just... well, you know.'
(*... loved you.*)
'It makes me feel forgotten...'
'...'
'What I wanted to say was...'
'...'
(*Not that it's going to change anything...*)
'Well... I just wanted to say that.' (Kawaguchi 51-52) (emphasis original)

This shows how individuals use narrative thinking not only to understand their past but also to confront the emotions tied to it, often leading to a deeper awareness of their own limitations and regrets.

Temporal Reconfigurations and the Transformative Power of Retrospective Knowledge

Historical and contemporary cognition show that new knowledge can reshape personal narratives and influence future decisions, even if the past remains unchanged. In "The Lovers," Fumiko learns about Goro's concealed "large burn scar that spread from his right eyebrow to his right ear" (Kawaguchi 53), and this triggers a change in how she views him. Nicola King asserts that "autobiographical narratives reconstruct the events of a life in the light of 'what wasn't known then,' highlighting the events which are now, with hindsight, seen to be significant" (22). This newfound awareness permits Fumiko to recontextualize prior interactions and emotional undercurrents, assisting to reconstruct her autobiographical memory in a manner that imbues past events with renewed significance and nuanced understanding. When Goro reveals his scar and admits, "I never thought that I was the right man for you... Because I have this..." (Kawaguchi 52-53), it disrupts Fumiko's previous understanding of their relationship. Before this disclosure, Fumiko's comprehension of Goro's reticence and perceived emotional distance was circumscribed by her limited awareness which led to misattributions and internalized doubts regarding his commitment and affection. Goro's confession allows Fumiko to revisit and reinterpret specific instances, such as his habitual gesture of stroking his right eyebrow or his reluctance to verbally affirm his love, not as indicators of indifference, but as manifestations of his vulnerability and self-doubt. This revision of her psychological narrative deepens her understanding of their past, adding emotional depth and empathy.

Knowledge of past events is "either present knowledge, modified through being of a past event, or a past event modified through being known now" (Perry 624); so, past events are temporally correlated with the present through their point of view rather than occurring at the present time. Fumiko's new knowledge of Goro's insecurity alters her memory of the past, transforming them from sources of confusion and pain into criteria of empathy and connection. Conversely, this shift in understanding also affects her present, providing closure and a new sense of purpose that was previously unattainable. Perry's concept of bidirectional modification shows how memory can change both ways and how our current understanding can shape and alter our past experiences; this shows how different times are interconnected in forming personal meaning. Fumiko's ephemeral return to the past, culminating in her witnessing Goro's promise, "Please wait three years. Then I'll return, I promise" (Kawaguchi 54), fortifies her resolve and reshapes her outlook towards the future. While the events of the past remain unchanged, Fumiko's new knowledge gives her hope and a renewed sense of self-worth. Goro's intentions of reunion and continued affection replace her feelings of abandonment with anticipation. Even without any change in time itself, I

hypothesize that altering our understanding can trigger significant psychological and emotional shifts. I also propose that these shifts have the potential to influence future decisions and emotional states. While the past remains unchangeable, the way it is interpreted is always open to refinement and re-evaluation. Fumiko's journey evinces, beyond doubt, that the past, though fixed in occurrence, is fluid in significance: "future events are often regarded as the reproductions of the past" (Shimizu and Noro 382). Individuals are empowered from this fluidity to derive renewed meaning from past experiences as it fosters growth and resilience which inform and enhance future possibilities. The story concludes by asserting that although one cannot change the events that have influenced them, one does have the lasting ability to reshape their impact and, by doing so, transform the trajectory of their lives.

Conclusions

The analysis clearly shows that Toshikazu Kawaguchi's "The Lovers" delves into how trauma can distort our understanding of time, thereby complicating the relationships between past, present, and future in the human psyche. Fumiko's time-travel experience vividly illustrates the deep connection between memory and identity, showing how unresolved trauma can cause persistent psychological distress by altering one's perception of time. In the story it has become evident that although the past remains unchanged, its influence on the present and future is continually renegotiated through memory and self-reflection. I have shown throughout my analysis that Fumiko's ongoing engagement with her past implies that while historical events are fixed, the meanings attached to them can shift, allowing for new emotional resolutions and opportunities to rebuild one's identity. In this line, future research could benefit from comparing Kawaguchi's work with other speculative fiction narratives that explore trauma and the fluidity of time. Comparative studies with texts that challenge linear time could offer deeper insights into how different cultural narratives address the interplay between trauma, memory, and identity. Additionally, integrating literary analysis with advances in cognitive science and trauma studies might enhance our understanding of how narrative structures affect psychological processes. This interdisciplinary approach could uncover new therapeutic strategies that use storytelling to foster emotional healing and assist individuals in reconstructing their identities post-trauma.

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Saintly Men and Sinister Ideals: Deconstructing the Indian Mard in Anubha Yadav's *The Anger of Saintly Men*

Abstract: This paper aims to critically analyze and theorize the construction of Indian manhood using Anubha Yadav's novel *The Anger of Saintly Men* (2021) as the primary text. Yadav's novel provides a closer analysis of stereotypical Indian masculinity and its conformity to patriarchal demands. With reference to the characters and their relationships, this paper seeks to explore the different socio-cultural facets that go into constructing Indian masculinity, like patriarchy, homophobia, and toxic masculinity. Thus, positioning Yadav's novel against the backdrop of existing theories of gender and masculinity, the paper highlights the hierarchical and damaging effects of normative masculinity and prescribes re-envisioning of what it means to be a man. This paper argues that the rigid constructs of masculinity in contemporary Indian society not only perpetuate homophobia but also contribute to the emotional repression of men, leading to a cycle of violence and discrimination.

Keywords: manhood, masculinity, patriarchy, homophobia, toxic masculinity.

Introduction

The term 'Mard' has a long-standing history, having been used across various of South Asian cultures as a synonym for male gender or a more general term denoting masculinity. Its etymology can be traced back to the Persian language, in which it has been used for centuries as a referent for men derived from the Persian word 'Mardum' which pertains to the notion of man or human (Syed and Tariq 369). With the advent of the Mughal empire in the sixteenth century, the Persian language and culture were disseminated in the Indian subcontinent. And the term 'Mard' made its way to the colloquial language and soon gained prominence. Historically, the term was associated with admirable qualities such as courage, strength, and wisdom. However, with time the term 'Mard' has undergone a metamorphosis and is now often associated with rigid forms of masculinity.

In the pre-colonial period, Indian men were actively involved in the domestic spheres of life and were encouraged to be emotionally expressive and not constrained by patriarchal notions. In many forms of pre-colonial Indian family systems, such as the joint family, both men and women exercised control over individuals in the house, with men being involved in the "domestic rites and ceremonies," "ritualistic participation," and having "kingship responsibilities," and women being charged with the "household chores," and "senior women […] at helm of affairs" (Bano 239). However, with the beginning of the nineteenth century, as the Victorian gender relations of 'separate spheres' started to gain prominence in India, new gender scripts and roles were formulated that positioned men towards the public realm of work, excluding them from the family affairs (Harvey, "Men Making Home…" - 2009). Therefore, the changes in the structure of the society, and new forms of organization of labor, the new roles prioritizing work over the domestic sphere, affected the balance of power and roles in the Indian families. The colonial influence reshaped the concept of masculinity in India, aligning it more closely with the Western models of male dominance in the public sphere, making a departure from the broader range of emotional expression and domestic engagement. After the Indian independence, the Indian constitution enacted the principles of gender equality resulting in legal changes in relation to violence against women and gender disparities. These legal shifts and change in views have pushed forward a more ethical and balanced

transformation in the field of gender relations in India. However, challenges such as high male sex-ratio and persistent gender bias continue to plague the Indian society.

As the concept of masculinity has evolved, so too has India's socio-economic landscape transformed with the rise of neoliberalism since the 1980s, embracing policies like market deregulation, privatization and fiscal austerity. Neoliberalism is a form of capitalism that seeks to reduce or minimize government intervention in the economic sphere and instead intensifies individual initiative and free market enterprise. The economic liberation of 1991 has led to immense alterations in the Indian society and culture. A strong ideology, neoliberalism has infiltrated into all aspects of the Indian community. It has influenced the way Indian men are seen and the manliness they portray. Before the period of economic liberalization, an orientation towards collectivism characterized the Indian social setup that recognized people as members of their families. Nevertheless, with the emergence of neoliberalism, there has been a shift towards an individualistic orientation. People are urged to focus on themselves. Unlike popular belief, the emergence of neoliberalism has nothing to do with rejecting conventional gender roles. This has, however, been detrimental as it hardens such patriarchal structures through altering power relations. More so, men should strive to advance in their careers, family, and other personal goals they hold dear to them. This simply reinforces the existing patriarchal societal structures.

In India, men have experienced a growing sense of identity crisis as a result of the shifting cultural definition of masculinity. Men have faced a lot of pressure to satisfy both traditional and modern values, which have often led to incongruous expectations (Sivakumar and Manimekalai 433). The neoliberal era's emphasis on individualism and competitiveness has exacerbated men's identity crises by adding to the pressures already felt by men to succeed and fit societal norms. Popular culture and the media's shift in their portrayal of the successful man have normalized aggressive, competitive, and ambitious behavior in men by praising the corporate warrior. This normalization of aggressive and violent behavior has had serious consequences for the Indian society, as incidents of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and other forms of gender-based violence have increased (Philip, *Becoming Young Men*… 160-169).

In *The Anger of Saintly Men* (2021) Anubha Yadav explores many facets of Indian cultural masculinities. The novel reveals the dreams of a generation that is enthralled with the 'IIT' (Indian Institute of Technology) dream but at the same time trapped in a patriarchal society. The story superbly engages with the tensions created by social norms, sexual impulses, and the need to abide by the prescribed masculine ideal, which in turn creates intricate emotional and psychological difficulties. The novel is divided into three parts that portray the life stories of the three brothers—Sonu, Anu and Vicky. This perspective allows the readers to go deeper into issues that make it hard for men to deal with challenges emanating from life, love, and desire, ultimately leading into a scathing denunciation of the harmful damage caused by a patriarchal society which oppresses and suppresses disadvantaged communities, especially females and children, exposing the anguish that afflicts the existence of such youth dreaming to be a genuine male. The story is set in the 1990s in the middle of India's introduction of neoliberal policies and liberalization programs in the country. These changes have brought about major transformations in different areas such as economy, politics, and social life, with each and every sphere of life being impacted by this phenomenon. The novel begins with the patriarch of the family striving for a job and seeking for help from other relatives, thus hinting at the limited job opportunities and the problems faced by unskilled workers in the post-liberalization period. In light of the evolving societal roles and shifts in socio-economic norms, this paper endeavors to examine and conceptualize the subjectivity of the Indian 'Mard' within this dynamic landscape. Most discussions on the novel have been limited to book reviews. One scholarly paper titled "Unveiling Implicit Stereotypes: The Praxis of Taming Men in Indian Households in Yadav's *The Anger of Saintly Men*," by J. Devasika and R.L.N. Raju, points out how societal pressure forces men to display aggression and emotional restraint, which creates psychological distress for them. Three characters in

Anubha Yadav's novel demonstrate various challenges associated with following patriarchal rules of behavior. The paper uses the social role theory to examine how historical masculinity standards affect emotional expression. However, the paper primarily discusses the conditioning of men into stereotypes without delving deeply into how these stereotypes actively shape their interactions with women or other marginalized groups. This paper examines Indian masculinity through a sophisticated analysis of masculine stereotypes at both a historical and contemporary level. It traces the historical development of masculinity through pre-colonial to the neoliberal era to deliver an expansive review of male identity changes. The analysis extends beyond implicit stereotypes, as it provides an integrated examination of patriarchy alongside homophobia and toxic masculinity, while exploring the legal and gender equality changes across India. It also integrates theories from Butler's performativity along with Raewyn Connell's conception of masculinity as expressed in her book *Masculinities* (2005), together with diverse academic perspectives resulting in multidimensional assessment. Through these findings the analysis proposes a masculinity redefinition that combines emotional openness and gender equality, which creates advanced frameworks for progress beyond basic stereotype identification.

Indian Family and Performing Masculinity

According to Judith Butler in her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (2004), the family instills gender constructions upon the child, teaches them about their gender identity and provides them with gender roles they are expected to perform. Besides that, Butler asserts that it is with the complicity of the nuclear family that they keep up with the strict gender norms and heteronormativity. This performativity is influenced by such things as genetic, social, and cultural influences of individual desires and experiences. Therefore, it becomes difficult to categorize gender as merely a fixed binary, but instead, it ought to be interpreted as an ever-changing entity influenced by numerous factors. The concept of traditional male roles encompasses the historically defined expectations and attributes of authority and masculinity that have been imposed on men for generations. This perspective is grounded in the belief that men are inherently superior in all matters, whether in public or private spheres. This rigid and conservative ideology is primarily conveyed through the family and subsequently passed down to younger generations. Moreover, patriarchal standards center on the notion that it is men who provide for their families financially. Men are always taught to venture beyond the household and assume their roles as breadwinners from a tender age. Such a norm is based on the presumption that men are made to make decisions and take leading roles in the society.

Raewyn Connell, in her book *Masculinities* (2005), defines masculinity as the "configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (77). In "Men, Feminism, and Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power" (1994), Michael Kaufman describes masculinity as a strange combination of power and privilege, pain and powerlessness (156). This connection can be traced back to the historical association between masculinity and strength, dominance and control, and the corresponding stigmatization of anything perceived as weak, submissive, or effeminate (Allan 9).

Masculinity in India is not a homogenized monolithic phenomenon but is actually a varying sociocultural one that is fraught with factors such as caste, class and family structure. Gender discrimination is often perpetuated through the socialization process where boys are told or discouraged from engaging in 'feminine' activities like "playing with dolls, helping mother-sister in the kitchen or household work" (Sivakumar and Manimekalai 430), and are trained to control and suppress their emotions. Young boys are raised to value their power and dominance, which in turn results in their inability to meaningfully express their feelings and form stable relationships. Finally, socialization for men aims at

building competitive, aggressive and leadership qualities, thus preserving and perpetuating traditional male gender roles in the Indian society. This view held by Vicky's father is similar to Julia Kristeva's idea about "abjection." Kristeva's theory of manhood revolves around "the abject," a term that is defined as "radically excluded" (2) and that forever threatens identity, system, order (19). According to Kristeva, "the abject" is conceptually connected with "the other" which usually refers to a female figure in a typical patriarchal society where the maternal is seen as an anomaly or an unsettling force which does not fit. Likewise, Sonu was forced by his parents to determine the gender of the unborn child, and when they discover it is a girl, they demanded that the pregnancy be terminated. The act of Sonu and his parents represents a continuation of the patriarchal mindset in India, that prioritizes males over females. Such an outlook contributes to cyclic sexism, making it more virulent and creating wider social discrimination against women.

Another example involves Vicky and his friends, who, under the influence of 'ganja' (Yadav 154), slip into a state of hallucination. This hallucination stipulates a fantasy that Vicky alongside two of his mates have been arrested from a public disorder and underwent sexual abuse and torture. In the course of his delusion, one of the friends, Ashish, presents his assumed masculinity as "Mard ka bachche" (Yadav 149-150), that is colloquially used in the Indian vernacular referring to children of men. This statement is significant considering that masculine traits such as strength and determination, even in the most difficult circumstances, represent key factors of the male identity in India. Ashish's statement is, thus, a declaration that he feels equal to everyone around him—an imaginary conversation between the man and the boy. This shows how widespread and ingrained the patriarchal attitudes are, even in individual consciousness within the society of India. This can be seen as the masculine expectation to always look tough, and refuse to give information regarding their assumed accomplices.

In his book *The Limits of Masculinity* (1977), Andrew Tolson examines the ways in which men are affected by strictly adhering to the traditional societal norms of what it means to be a 'man.' Tolson argues that since the traditional concept of masculinity prioritizes certain characteristic traits like strength, stoicism, and repression of emotions, this often leads to negative outcomes such as aggression, violence, and psychological problems. Tolson contends that patriarchal societies view men as protectors while expecting women to be inherently submissive and thereby relegating them to the domestic sphere and assigning them the position of caretaker. In this sense, the conventional idea of manliness is harmful to both men and women alike, since it reinforces oppressive power structures and upholds sexist power dynamics. During the course of his ethnographic research aimed at understanding "roles, relationships, anxieties, desires and performances" ("Is There a 'Post-Patriarchal' Indian Man?" 2) among young Indian men, Shannon Philip finds that his informants strongly believed that it was the men's responsibility to safeguard the women from any kind of violence. By adopting this viewpoint, they considered themselves to be modern young men whose sensitivity and thoughtfulness distinguished them from their old generation. One of the informants named Raj even expressed this by saying, "In older times, things were different, my dad and all are really old fashioned, they don't know how things are now" (149). According to him, being a part of the modern urban youth or, as the author uses the term, "Urban Smart striver," his role went beyond maintaining a positive outlook on India's economic progress. Additionally, it entailed caring sensitively about the lives of women, which marked a new approach to Indian masculinities, as Raj stressed on his desire to "protect" the women he truly cared about (149-150).

The above research gains substantial significance when considered in the context of the novel, where, one day upon returning home, Sonu stumbles on a horrifying incident that his sister Anju's honor was violated by the owner of a flour mill, by subjecting her to inappropriate touch. Instead of calling for legal action, Sonu's mother in a spur of the moment hands him a knife and asks him to solve the matter with violence. She tells him "Go and fix that atta ki chakki wala. Tell that old man to behave his age. Give him

one across his face. Harami. Cut him" (Yadav 29). This episode shows how families can become the epicenter to propagate violence even among young boys to resolve issues, as the boys are brought up to believe that only violence is the right way to solve disputes. As Chris Haywood and Mairtin Mac an Ghaill posit, men often resort to violent behavior in order to establish their masculinity and supremacy against other people, which is subsequently perceived as normal or justifiable by the society (*Men and Masculinities…* - 2003). Such expectations have an effect on young boys like Sonu, who runs away from violence and fabricates a lie that he has already dealt with the situation. Unfortunately, his lie is exposed, and his mother curses him for not being a man by saying, "You should have died the day you were born, Sonu" (Yadav 30), because he failed to fulfill all her expectation of violence. Lauren Berlant, therefore, describes "masculinity" as "a cruel optimism" ("Cruel Optimism" 94). Although appealing, the masculine (the male gender) brings along losses in the sense that the privilege does not allow failure within its limit. They have reason to be afraid of failure, as it constitutes humiliation "for not living up to the standards which have been imposed" (Allan 9). This part of the novel becomes important because it symbolizes the damaging expectations put upon young men in their homes, where violence is regarded as part of the problem resolving approach. And the refusal to use violence to resolve the issue, along with the subsequent condemnation, further emphasizes the social force that demands boys and young men to conform to what is considered normal manly behavior, thereby highlighting the harmful impacts of social patriarchy. The honor of a female member in the household takes more precedence over any other matter, since its violation is often equated to a family's loss of rank and prestige in the society. Therefore, it reinforces the perception that women are considered as mere possessions whose purity and modesty must be protected at all costs. Such ideas further foster an environment of violence affecting both the sexes alike.

This episode is soon followed by an incident where Sonu catches his brother Anu kissing their cousin Anju on her lips, and he goes and reports it to his mother. The following day Anju is sent back to her home, and the entire culpability of the incident is attributed to her by the matriarch of the family, when she exclaims, "Thank God she has gone. What a burden she was, always prancing around with her chest out, looking for a new prey like a jungle cat" (Yadav 31). This particular statement is significant as it brings out a general perception that the woman is solely responsible for any wrong-doing, whereas completely absolving their male counterparts of any blame. This can be related to what Laura Bates writes in her book *Everyday Sexism* (2016), that "sexism is a socially acceptable prejudice and everybody is getting in on the act" (13). Moreover, the way Anju's image is tarnished reveals the degree of objectification and demoralization women experience on a daily basis. It exemplifies the societal problem of discrimination against women which tends to project a culture of shame onto the female sex, while granting freedom to the men to pursue or gratify their sexual freedom without any inhibitions.

Toxic Masculinity and Gender Socialization

According to the famous American psychiatrist Terry A. Kupers, toxic masculinity can be defined as "the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence" (714). Toxic masculinity posits that the aggression and frustration observed in men stems from a society that emasculates boys and does not provide them with rites and initiations to attain manhood. Thus, this movement sought to defend what it called a "deep masculine; a protective 'warrior' masculinity" (Mabrouk 421). Historically, cultural and societal norms have often dictated that men be heterosexual and actively reject anything deviant from it. This has led to a culture of toxic masculinity where men are expected to be proving their heterosexuality through acts of aggression, bullying, and violence toward those who do not fit into the stereotypical male profile. Toxic masculinity relates to a set of standards that endorse a limited and destructive form of masculinity,

especially the permission to be unemotional, behave violently, and subdue women. This ideology prepares boys for manhood by disallowing them to show any signs of emotional frailty and thus results in a harsh exterior that is prevalent in violence and lack of empathy. It promotes the negative role of masculinity, implying that men must be fully rational, which entails aggressiveness and constant competition as well as regarding as shameful everything that is seen as feminine. The consequences of toxic masculinity are life-altering as they lead to poor mental health and destructive interpersonal relationships because many men feel forced to adhere to these expectations.

In the course of the novel, when Vicky's father is informed that Vicky may have been sexually abused by one of his schoolmates, Vicky's father admonishes his son by saying "don't allow your school make you a sissy" (Yadav 138). It is evident that this statement illustrates a larger societal attitude towards dismissing sexual abuse and rather, treating it as just an exaggerated event associated with the school. In fact, by calling his son a "sissy," the father seems to insinuate that getting raped diminishes a man's identity or rather emasculates him. The case highlights a shocking lack of concern for child welfare and emphasizes placing community standards before child safeguarding. Another stark manifestation of toxic masculinity can be seen when Sonu and his brother Anu indulge in a masturbating competition among themselves to see who can withhold the ejaculation for more time while looking at cheap flimsy magazines. And when Sonu loses to Anu, he forces himself upon a street dog named Brownie in order "to experience an erection that would outlast all of Anu's erections" (Yadav 87). Thus, the culture of toxic masculinity results in a skewed perception of what it means to be a man, where the self-worth of a man is equated to his virility, for which he views everything around him that is physically weaker as objects that need to be conquered and dominated. And therefore, the toxic masculinity often manifests itself in the form of homophobia, with gay men being the primary targets of aggression. The uncanny correlation between masculinity and homophobia has led to the marginalization of gay men and has characterized them as weak and unmanly, leading to a culture of hostility and exclusion towards them and also creating a climate of fear and self-loathing among gay men themselves. Women are also stigmatized for not conforming to the stereotypical norm and criticized for not being feminine enough.

Intersectionality of Masculinity and Homophobia

Judith Butler argues that "the regulatory norms of gender cohere with the systemic norms of capital, and they do so in ways that reinforce the idea of a natural binary gender system and a natural 'heterosexual matrix'" (*Gender Trouble* 98). The capitalistic system is predicated upon a clear separation of labor, with men specializing in more traditional masculine jobs and women performing the traditionally feminine jobs. By reinforcing the notion that there are only two gender roles and that men are suited to specific kinds of work, this division of labor contributes to the perpetuation of the gender binary. Homophobia seems to mimic a strict gender binary and reinforces the idea that heteronormativity is the norm, while any deviation from this norm is seen as a threat to the stability of the system.

The rise of homophobia can be traced back to the emergence of the modern-day State, which has sought to define and control sexuality through a variety of legal and institutional mechanisms. In addition to his analysis of the institutional foundations of homophobia, Michael Warner, in his "Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet" (1991), also offers a critique of the preeminent forms of resistance to homophobia that have emerged over the past few decades. He argues that many of the strategies, such as the demand for gay marriage or the pursuit of legal rights, are misguided and ultimately strengthen the very system of oppression that they seek to challenge. Warner advocates for a more radical form of resistance that seeks to unravel the cultural roots of homophobia. And this necessitates the development of alternative models of community and intimacy that are not rooted in the heteronormative order. In its broader sense, homophobia is characterized by a sense of dislike or hatred towards homosexuals. This can stem from

either a general cultural prejudice or a specific bias held by the individual. In her book *Gender Trouble Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Judith Butler theorizes gender as a "social performance" (180) subject to institutional and normative control. She argues that these norms and institutions, such as the nuclear family and the State, help perpetuate a sex-based binary society. This binary understanding of gender seems to reinforce heteronormativity, the belief that there are two genders and that heterosexual relationships are the norm.

Recent research demonstrates that homophobia negatively impacts both the homosexuals and heterosexuals alike (Devlin and Cowan, "Homophobia, Perceived Fathering…" - 1985). Drawing parallels to conventional prejudices against ethnic minorities, research shows that homophobia increases exponentially when people have little or no contact with homosexuals. Further, while gender did influence the extent of interpersonal homophobia, where straight men were found to be more homophobic than women, however, it did not predict the level of internalized homophobia (Cullen, Wright, and Alessandri, "The Personality Variable Openness…" - 2002). Thus, homophobia can exist in both external (strictly adhering to heteronormative norms) and internal manifestations (the subconscious internalization of latent anti-homosexual emotions). Along the spectrum, the intensity of homophobic attitudes can range from mild prejudice to outright hostility towards people who possess sexual preference towards same-sex people (Fyfe, "'Homophobia' or Homosexual Bias Reconsidered" - 1983). According to the social control theory, homophobia is generated by positing heteronormativity as the only acceptable sexual orientation, so that people who are not heterosexual should be subjected to physiological and psychological intimidation because of their orientation. Owing to the rigid conceptions of gender roles, homophobia is sometimes also rooted in the heterosexuals' conviction that homosexuality is nothing but a manifestation of gender confusion. Therefore, gay males are despised and detested since "they act like women," (Speice, "The Okay Gay Guys…" - 1873) and on the other hand, lesbianism is perceived as a usurpation of male power and authority (Bindel, "Lesbians Are a Target…" - 2019).

In a similar manner, 'role theory' posits that homophobic attitudes emerge when traditional preconceptions and notions associated with particular sex identities and gender are challenged. Individuals are expected to take an active role in preserving the societal norms and values by acting in ways that are consistent with the established forms of ideals and conduct, thereby providing positive examples to follow (Sullivan 2). Therefore, a change in the established dynamic poses a challenge to both the hierarchically expressed and implicit boundaries of what is masculine and feminine, provoking resentment among the people who believe that non-conformist gender behaviors may result in sexual disorientation among the youth, leading to social anarchy. This view is further bolstered by those who believe that homosexuality is nothing but a matter of individual preference. As David M. Halperin argues, homophobia is not simply a prejudice or an irrational fear of homosexuality, but a fundamental component of the social and cultural organization of sexuality (51) not as a natural or universal phenomenon, but rather as a product of specific historical and cultural practices that stigmatize and discriminate against same-sex desire and behavior. In his ethnographic research Shannon Philip finds that homophobia is so prevalent even among the young educated Indian men that in order to establish a bond between two men, a desexualized "bhai-bhai" (brotherly) ("Is There….?" 90) homosocial relation is needed, coupled with the attempt of sustaining heterosexual dynamics by poking fun at or disregarding homosexuality. In the vignette, one of the author's informants named Aman has to use homophobic speech in order to exude strong heterosexuality. And such use of language and behavior is crucial to him, ensuring that commonplace public acts like urinating together with his friends can be carried out with confidence, without the fear of being suspected of any homoerotic notion ("Is There….?" 90-94).

Homophobia becomes apparent in the novel as Anu reacts to the news about Professor Murthy's being a homosexual or bisexual man. Until then, Anu had always held Professor Murthy, who taught them "Data

Structures and Algorithms" (Yadav 115) in high esteem and had often spent hours discussing poetry with him at home. To such an extent had Anu become fascinated by his professor's proficiency that he had informed his friend Nikhil that "you live with a genius" (Yadav 122). However, when Anu realized Professor Murthy is gay, things changed—"why would he have sent the volume of poetry? That while lecture about flowers. Roses! Who talks about all this? His stomach churned. He felt sick. Professor Murthy gave him the research as a bribe since he was stalking him?" (Yadav 126). In fact, he goes as far as thinking Nikhil might follow his father's footstep by becoming a homosexual. This demonstrates how widespread homophobia is coupled with ignorance and biasedness as discussed earlier. Finally, as this is the last straw for Anu, he moves to another room in the hostel so that he does not live next to the children of the gay person. Moreover, Anu shaves his head completely in order to eliminate all chances of attracting Nikhil. Anu's discomfort with the idea of being associated with a gay man articulates a common fear among young men: the fear of being perceived as weak or unmanly. This moment is pivotal, as it encapsulates the internalized homophobia that many men face, leading them to police their own identities and those of others. Yadav's nuanced portrayal of these characters reveals the psychological toll that such societal pressures exact on individuals, ultimately calling for a re-examination of masculinity that embraces vulnerability and emotional expression.

Conclusions

The paper exposes the way familial and societal demands for men to conform to rigid masculine ideals of dominance, competitiveness and material success have been amplified by modern day individualism. This intensifying of patriarchal masculinity has harmful ramifications, fostering rampant gender discrimination, domestic violence, homophobia and the repression of males' emotional selves.

Yadav's nuanced characterizations reveal the anguish and psychic toll experienced by young Indian men striving to attain the elusive model of manliness propagated by the patriarchal value system. Their personal struggles epitomize the identity crisis faced by an entire generation caught between retrograde patriarchal dictates and the pressures of a rapacious capitalism that commoditises human beings.

Ultimately, the paper aims to read the novel as a searing indictment of hegemonic Indian masculinity and its damaging effects on both women and men themselves. Thus, the paper calls for a radical revisioning of what constitutes true manliness—one grounded in gender equity, bodily autonomy and the full realization of human potentialities unconstrained by regressive social codes. Only such a liberating reconceptualization can address the "anger of saintly men" and redeem the Indian masculine self.

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Exploring the Intersection of Liminality and Identity Formation in S. B. Divya's *Meru* (2023)

Abstract: In the last couple of decades, there has been a proliferation of science fiction narratives that focus on the aspects of identity alongside a deep critique of political autocracy, dictatorship, and coloniality. Such narratives explore deeper nuances of self and identity by situating characters into a suffocatingly controlled society, thus magnifying the significance and potentialities of the adolescence stage in the process of identity formation. This article aims to analyze S. B. Divya's *Meru* (2023) with a particular focus on the theme of identity formation, employing Victor Witter Turner's theory of liminality and Erik Erikson's theory of personal identity. The study goes beyond the scrutiny of the liminoid protagonist of the novel to discern the planet Meru as a liminal space. Establishing its argument on this discussion, it addresses the following questions: a) How are the different contours of liminality portrayed as sites of deviant possibilities in the novel? b) How does the protagonist's identity formation function as a resistance against the status quo and bring revolutionary transformations in the novel?

Keywords: liminality, psychosocial identity, identity formation, adolescence

Introduction

In her first novel, *Machinehood* (2021), S. B. Divya advocates the rights of sentient robots in a future India. The universe of the novel is portrayed as an apogee of the commercial world, which runs on the productivity of its human and non-human subjects equally, thus generating cut-throat competition and intolerance toward the emerging population of posthumans. On the other hand, her second novel, *Meru* (2023), juxtaposes the nexus and situates humanity in a marginalized position advocating the rights of humans in an Alloy era. Divya's point of engagement in both these texts is not tilted towards any of the two species. It provokes the prevalent discourse on posthuman/human ethics, reflecting on the inevitable upcoming age of machines, robots, clones, or alloys. It is also interesting to observe that rather than being shunned by the thought of sharing society with machines, Divya suggests a more practical approach to a harmonious coexistence of both species in the denouements of both novels. In these futuristic imaginations, the problematization of identity becomes more dominant beyond trans- or post-human perspectives. We encounter the protagonists as not completely human or posthumans but somewhere in-between, in the interstice of the two, thus occupying a liminal space.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, identity has been a central concern in many science fiction narratives, such as *The Giver* (1993), *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Divergent* (2011), *Escape* (2008), and *Clone* (2018). While researchers such as Inchirah Allele (*Identity Construction in Suzanne Collins' The Hunger Games* - 2016), Rindi Mustika et al. ("The Significance of Memory in Solving Individual's Identity Crisis Depicted in James Dashner's *The Maze Runner*" - 2018), Carrie Hintz ("Monica Hughes, Lois Lowry, and Young Adult Dystopias" - 2002), and Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry (*Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* - 2013) have explored the Western SF texts with a focus on the trope of identity formation, the Indian SF narratives remain untouched from the perspective, except for a recent paper by Jain and Jha ("Dystopian Bildungsroman: Rasa, Emotions, and Identity in Priya Sarukkai Chabria's *Clone* [2018] - 2023). The present article is situated at this juncture. It intervenes in the area of Indian

science fiction using an ingenious framework that penetrates spatiotemporal dimensions and unravels deeper nuances of identity formation in literary narratives. The employment of liminal theory alongside the psychosocial notion of identity formation is a novel approach to the analysis of literary narratives. Thus, this study proves to be very relevant and contributes to the field of Indian science fiction and identity studies by opening new pathways for future research in these areas.

This article aims to analyze S. B. Divya's *Meru* (2023) with a magnified lens on the theme of identity formation while incorporating discussions on liminality and psychosocial identity. The study moves beyond the psychosomatic liminality of the protagonist and treats the planet Meru as a liminal space. It explores how the liminal spaces become the sites of digression, deviancy, and identity formation for the protagonist in the novel. To fulfill these aims, the study employs a synergistic approach by mutual reciprocation of Victor Turner's theory of liminality and Erik Erikson's notion of psychosocial identity formation. The article addresses the following questions: a) How are the different contours of liminality portrayed as sites of deviant possibilities in the novel? b) How does the protagonist's identity formation function as a resistance against the status quo and bring revolutionary transformations in the novel?

Arnold Van Gennep (*The Rites of Passage* - 1960) coined the term "liminal" to describe the second stage of his tripartite paradigm of rites of passage (the other two being pre- and post-liminal), which represented a time and certain cultural rituals of transition from childhood to adulthood and was practiced in certain tribal communities as he elaborated in his work. Later, Victor Tuner borrowed the term and expanded its dimensions by construing it as a universal phenomenon in "wider cultural, political, economic and social contexts, as well as within cultural texts" (qtd. in Thomas 45). Turner's scholarship in the area expanded wider than Gennep's since he revisited, revised, and improved the concept throughout his life; thus, his theory is quite exhaustive and proves to be pertinent to our current purpose. The article engages with Turner's scholarship on liminality in relation to personal identity since "liminality [and] anti-structure… are useful models… to explore issues of social or personal identity, deepening our understanding of human subjectivity" (qtd. in Thomas 55-56). There are three facets of liminality explored in this article in reference to the novel: a) Jayanthi as a liminoid protagonist, b) Meru (a planet) and Chedi (a megaconstruct)[17] as liminal spaces, and c) adolescence as a liminal stage of identity formation.

The article is divided into three sections: while the first section elaborates on the theoretical framework used in the article, the second and third sections scrutinize different dimensions of liminality in relation to the process of identity formation in reference to the selected novel.

Theoretical Framework

Victor Turner's elaboration on Gennep's idea attached the liminality primarily to the identities of those digressive characters as well as marginalized communities believed to be anti-structural to the prevalent norms of the societies they dwell in. In Turner's words, "the attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous" since they elude "the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between" (*The Ritual Process…* 95). It is in between 'this' and 'that,'[18] the liminality exists, a time and space of uncertainties and unrecognizability but also of "boundless, potentially infinitely limitless nature" and opportunities at the same time (Thomas 50). Invisibility, darkness, eclipse, vampires, dusk, adolescence, and emigrants can be discerned as examples of liminality or liminal beings. Looking at this phenomenon from a different angle, the adolescence stage of Erikson's theory can also be connotated as

[17] In the novel, megaconstructs are sentient machines that can be different in size, shape, or quality based on their requirement and can accommodate humans or nonhumans. Chedi, a megaconstruct, is the size of a half-moon.

[18] In the middle of pre- and post-liminal phases, between puberty and adulthood, in an undetermined passage, beyond any set of norms and codes of cultural space.

a liminal passage that accounts for a transition from childhood to adulthood, as is examined in the last section in reference to the novel.

In his theory of identity formation, Erik Erikson informs of a seemingly unaccounted delay in the transition period from the adolescent stage to early adulthood, which he calls "psychosocial moratorium" (*Identity…* 156). According to him, this moratorium is necessary for an adolescent to understand and experiment with multiple ideologies and possibilities for one's identity and future directions. His psychosocial approach critically examines adolescence as a transitional passage in which a youth develops a "historical perspective," breaks away from childhood identifications, and forges one's personal identity. The historical perspective is a phenomenon that "comes to develop only during adolescence" and generates "a sense of irreversibility of significant events" in history (*Identity…* 247). Due to the historical perspective, a youth is able to discern the chronological development of one's present value system as attached to a single ideologue and comprehend how narratives in history played out to create the present condition of oneself and society. It develops a unified understanding of the fundamental functioning of society. This is followed by a negotiation between old and new ideologies and results in the rejection of childhood identification and, more often than not, "a rebellion against or withdrawal from the parental environment… [as] an expression of a truly new perspective" (*Identity…* 246). In this way, by the accumulative cognition of history, past, present, reality, and lived experiences, a youth consciously forges one's identity and chooses their "way of life" (Cote and Levine 99).

This article incorporates liminality and Erikson's psychosocial identity formation in tandem to analyze the selected text. Both theories, to a great extent, complement each other. Tuner's notion of liminality is an extension of the spatiotemporal dimension of Erikson's idea of adolescence. They treat the intervening time as a delay—'moratorium' for Erikson and 'passage' for Turner—to reach a stage of adulthood, maturity, or certainty in life. This framework of inquiry proves to be very relevant for scrutinizing otherwise inconspicuous intricacies and potential of the adolescent stage of identity. The liminal phase is equal to the Eriksonian identity crisis and uncertainty when "Ambiguity reigns; people and public policies may be judged skeptically in relation to deep values; the vices, follies, stupidities, and abuses of contemporary holders of high political, economic, or religious status may be satirized, ridiculed, or condemned in terms of axiomatic values" (qtd. in Thomas 57). This is the reason why many adolescent characters in the speculative genre are portrayed as 'liminoid' since they possess the possibilities of digression and creative revolution in their 'in-between' state, thus occupying and claiming a liminal space not only to challenge the status quo but also to establish their 'liminal' state as a ground to forge personal identity, as also observed in *Meru*.

The differences between liminality and liminoidality should also be mentioned, which shifts Gennep's original theory from a collective to an individualized approach. While the liminal phase, as introduced by Gennep, was a group character, Turner coined the term liminoidality[19] to define a subjunctive individualized way of transition in contemporary industrial and liberal scenarios, which can also be construed as an individualized passage of identity formation. As Sylwia Jaskulska writes, "At present, we ourselves design the passages that we experience and liminality [or liminoidality] of growing up is not a stage between clearly defined 'there' and precisely stated 'here'" (98). Thus, liminoidality, like an identity crisis during adolescence, is attributed to the willing suspension of societal rules and is "characterized with

[19] Liminality has a certain defined stage of pre-, post-, and liminal. However, the contemporary propensity towards individual values, freedom, and a diverse variety of identifications cannot fall under the same ambit of liminality. Unlike the African tribes, there are no religiously or culturally defined rites of passage. Thus, the concept of 'passage' should be treated as a metaphor for a modern individual based on one's own individual choice. Thus, Turner introduced the term 'liminoidality' to address a subjective or individual interstice.

some continuity… but at the same time with fragmentary and experimental nature," attaching it to the ideas of criticism and revolution (Jaskulska 98).

Further, liminoidality as a passage of identity formation has been a repetitive trope in speculative fiction from popular Mangas such as *Naruto* and *Black Clover* to the Indian speculative narratives like *Clone* (2018) by Priya Sarukkai Chabria, *The Island of Lost Girls* (2015) by Manjula Padmanabhan, "Thirst" story by Vandana Singh, and *Liar's Weave* (2017) by Tashan Mehta. Singh's characters in some of her stories, as mentioned in the book *Science Fiction in India* (2022), often dangle between two worlds in the recesses of lingual and cultural recognitions of society and thus are viewed as the Other. However, their otherness is represented as a site for identity formation,[20] like the liminal protagonist of *Meru*. Similarly, Zahan Merchant, the protagonist of Mehta's novel, is literally sketched as a person without a future (while all characters in the novel have future charts); thus, he is forced into being a "liminoid." Her representation is brilliant in the sense that she reifies the unlimited probabilities of adolescent liminality literally in her character. While the representations of this process of identity formation differ from narrative to narrative depending upon "which aspect of personal identity is being ritualised/explored," what remains constant is the "interstitial nature of liminal subjects" (Thomas 50).

Practicing Liminoidality in Liminal Spaces in *Meru* (2023)

> "Like the dusk that bathed the sky, she occupied a liminal space. Of Earth but not like other humans; of alloys but unsuited to life in space" (Divya 16).

The story of the novel is set in a far-distant future when humanity has long ago willingly suspended its dominance on all life forms, ecology, and nature and has given control to alloys. Alloys are human-like sentient robots with super-human abilities and are born prodigious in size and shape; thus, they are able to roam in the open spaces of the universe. They "helped [humanity] keep the planet healthy, and in exchange, they took asteroids" from humans (Divya 12). The premise for this situation is that humans, in the past, had exploited the Earth and colonized the Moon and Mars owing to their consumerist culture, which resulted in the large-scale destruction of these planets. To end this era of Anthropocene, alloys were bestowed with the responsibility to control and sustain humanity while reversing environmental degradation and bringing equilibrium to the ecology of the universe. This premise contains a crucial point of argument by attaching the repercussions of contemporary anthropocentric and capital-centric practices to this catastrophic future of the human species. It also points towards the catachronistic proclivity of a number of contemporary climate fiction, as Pramod Nayar points out in his recent book *Vulnerable Earth* (2024). Borrowing from Srinivas Aravamudan, he defines catachronism as "the opposite of anachronism," which "re-characterizes the past and the present in terms of a future proclaimed as determinate but that is of course not yet fully realized" (Nayar 7).

In this social structure of the Alloy era, the human species has been marginalized for centuries, and their movement has been restricted to Earth only. Among alloys, humans' symbolic identity remains that of a greedy, overly ambitious, and destructive species who had, in the past, ransacked the natural resources of planets for their own luxury. Earth, due to its gravitational force, is a prison for criminal alloys, who have to stay in human size and shape through their incarns[21] and serve humanity for a certain duration on Earth's surface as punishment. The structure of society suggests that humanity and anything related to

[20] For a detailed discussion on otherness in Vandana Singh's stories, see Chapter 3 in *Science Fiction in India* (Edited by Shweta Khilnani and Ritwick Bhattacharjee, Bloomsbury Academic India, 2022).

[21] An 'incarn' is a temporary human size body that can be created through an artificial womb.

humans has been reduced to an inferior status through what Slavoj Zizek calls symbolic violence: the violence of language on the bodies of a certain group[22] or, in the case of the selected text, a certain race. Here is an extract from the novel that reads, "The CDS [Constructed Democracy of Sol] mandated that alloys could not gather in the same location for longer than ten varshas. Permanent human structures—farms, villages, cities—had created most of Earth's problems" (Divya 40-41). The 'gathering' of alloys for a long duration does not include any negative characteristic per se; however, since humans used to live like this, it has become an illegal activity. In this way, everything related to humans has been attached to a condensed meaning of 'devastation,' 'destruction,' or 'crisis.' Their existence has become a paragon of futility. In the novel, the prevalent symbolic narrative regarding the human species is apparent through Kaliyu's statement, "Humans are terrible people. First they polluted Earth, then they turned Mars into a hot, stormy hellhole when they tried to terraform it. Now they want to do the same to Meru [a newly discovered planet]. They have no gratitude for the work alloys… do to keep Earth clean and safe and livable" (Divya 61-62).

In this universe, Jayanthi, the 22-year-old protagonist, is a unique human who suffers from sickle cell anemia, "a disease long since eradicated from Earth" (Divya 3). She was born of an artificial womb with an ancient DNA combination and thus was administered with certain alloy capabilities; her birth was an experiment, "a conscious choice to revive an old genome," but became "an anomaly" (Divya 3). She was "a human child born to two alloys [Vidhar and Kundhina], given emtalk[23] capabilities, and lacking a surname" (Divya 16) and thus was treated as an outsider and an alien by other humans on Earth. These abilities differentiate her from others; she is discriminated against by humans because she is not "human enough" and by alloys because "she was too human for people in space" (Divya 19). In other words, she occupies a liminal space "betwixt and between" both species (Turner, *The Ritual Process…* 95).

The fundamental question, repetitively approached in the novel, is that of purpose. For alloys, their ultimate achievement is to contribute to the existing knowledge of Nivid through new discoveries of genetic composition, evolved life forms, or exploration of new planets, galaxies, and unexplored but useful spaces in the universe. Nivid is a place in outer space where the CDS has created an expansive repository of all available knowledge and information. In the novel, Nivid has replaced God and functions as an ultimate existential purpose in the lives of alloys; it is a great honor for them to register their name in the Nivid. However, the human species is deprived of this opportunity. Being considered menial and insignificant beings, they cannot possibly contribute anything of importance to the Nivid. It is interesting to note that the phonocentric metanarrative of God has shifted to a logocentric narrative of Nivid. We connotate that, in a certain manner, the teleological impact remains consistent in both cases, that both God and Nivid are believed to provide some purpose for the greater good. But, since the human species cannot contribute to the Nivid and there is no existence of the notion of God, there is a complete absence of existential purpose for them under the rules of the Constructed Democracy of Sol (CDS, the central government of the universe). Humans are expected to live through their lives in peace without affecting their environment or creating any chaos, passing the time on Earth only; as Jayanthi's friend Anita puts it, "There's so much you could do—garden, cook, make music, raise children. Our lives are luxuries... *Ambition and materialism lead to greed and exploitation*" (Divya 13, emphasis original). They are like children who are not allowed to mature and grow, as Jayanthi rightly mentions in her final speech to all the citizens of the CDS, "What the compact and our present society don't allow for… is that children can mature" (Divya 393-94).

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[22] For a detailed discussion on symbolic violence, see Slavoj Zizek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008).

[23] It is a medium of nonverbal communication which can be controlled through blinking. Apart from alloys, Jayanthi is the only human who possesses this.

Further, those who want to mature and grow out of their symbolic childhood and aspire for a purpose beyond earthly limits and entertainment survive in a state of indefinite liminality since there is no recourse for them to fulfill their desires for a purpose. The SHWA, a group of such young people in the novel, represents this predicament of human existence who crave a purpose for a subjunctive maturity but are stuck at the somewhat liminal stage, an eternal adolescent in an Eriksonian sense since there is no space (interestingly at both literal and metaphorical levels) to grow out of these restrictions on Earth; there is no possibility of the mandatory Eriksonian "identity crisis" in their safe environment, as a human character on Chedi mentions in the novel, "Most people are content with having others think well of them, but some need more. They want to feel accomplished, like they've pushed at some boundaries of all knowledge and made it yield to their efforts" (267).

On the difference between liminal and liminoid, Andrew D. Spiegel writes, "the liminal provides opportunity only for rebellion followed by a return to the status quo ante, while the liminoid has the potential to produce revolutionary change" (13). While her friends at SHWA are liminal, Jayanthi possesses a liminoid stance. What becomes different in her case is that, unlike her friends, she does not share a complete sense of belongingness either to humans or to alloys. She is outrightly in the interstice between the two and thus is doubly-liminalised: a) she is a liminal being like other SHWA members who are stuck at an adolescent stage without being allowed to grow and b) she is a liminoid who has to endure the status of 'otherness' or 'in-betweenness;' thus she seeks the grounds for her identity formation in her very othered existence (her genetic anomaly). In this regard, Rhys Thomas comments, "the narrative impetus of those cultural texts which feature liminal protagonists is often provided by an individual's need to reverse the structurally negative characteristic" of one's personality (51). This is the reason why Jayanthi takes an interest in her own genetic composition and genetic science in general. The drive for her studies has been her desire "to discover something worthy of the Nivid, [so that] she could prove her value to all of them," in other words, to "reverse" her liminal destiny (Divya 19). With this goal in mind, she has been experimenting with her DNA and trying to compose a newly evolved design using her own gene, mixing it with that of other possible samples with the help of Hamsa (a tarawan) so that she could "reverse the… negative characteristics" of her biology and prove her worth. According to the CDS laws, it is a work that can only be carried out by or under the supervision of a tarawan, a licensed alloy expert in genetics. Thus, she aspires to become a tarawan, which is not allowed according to the laws of the CDS. To attain this goal, Jayanthi repetitively desires to be an alloy and mocks human existence throughout most of the novel:

> Deep down, she wished she'd been born an alloy… (Divya 48)
> I would give anything to be an alloy. (Divya 277)
> "You must be joking," Jayanthi said. "I'm sure nothing we produce could reach the level of alloy entertainment…" (Divya 96)

It is evident from these quotes that Jayanthi believes in the prevalent narrative and considers humans an inferior species who are corrupt with a tendency of greed, avarice, and destruction. In Eriksonian terms, it is this childhood ideology that she grew up with, learning and understanding things from a single perspective of the Alloy era. In the course of her journey from Earth to planet Meru and her return to the Nivid, which functions as a 'moratorium' for her identity, this is the most significant psychological transformation that accounts for her identity crisis and, eventually, personal identity formation as elaborately discussed in the next section.

In the discourse of liminal entities, Divya's text does not restrict itself to the liminoid nature of its protagonist but also introduces Meru, the newly discovered planet, as a truly liminal space. It is in this liminal space where Jayanthi finds a type of unrestricted freedom to grow out of her uncertain destiny, to come out of the childhood ideological chains that have been put on her mind, to freely experiment and

experience her own body even if performing such acts goes against the laws of the CDS. Meru is a recently discovered planet where the CDS is yet to extend its dominance; it is that Turnerian unstructured space where society can represent "its subjunctive mood, where suppositions, desires, hypotheses, possibilities, and so forth, all become legitimate" (*The Ritual Process…* vii). Interestingly, this liminal space of Meru proves to be welcoming to the liminal body of Jayanthi. Meru's atmosphere has an excess density of oxygen that is detrimental to a normal human body; however, it is an advantage to Jayanthi's body due to her sickle cell disease. As Jayanthi's initial research proves, "In an atmosphere like Meru's… a tweak to… [her] genes regulating HMOX-1 would prevent the associated lung damage. Someone with that combination ought to live a long and healthy life on Meru" (Divya 33). Thus, in this interim liminal space with Jayanthi's liminal body, "the possibility exists of standing aside not only from… [her] own social position [as liminal] but from all social positions" and of forming a personal identity according to her own beliefs and values even while resisting and reforming laws of the status quo in the process (Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors…* 13-14).

Inferentially, it is in this alien land she experiences deviant possibilities of her body: she falls in love with her pilot alloy, Vaha; they get involved in a corporeally romantic relationship; she makes a baby by mixing Vaha's DNA with her own using an artificial womb, which is treated as a severe crime according to the laws of the CDS. All these acts are illegal according to the CDS laws but find validation only on this outside land. Thus, suspending the fetters of both the alloy and the human societies, liminality functions as an interstice that contains unlimited possibilities in the novel. Rather than being treated as an inferior, Jayanthi's 'outsiderhood' emerges as an advantage to her for successful identity formation.

Identity Formation as a Tool of Revolutionary Transformation

> "She'd chased an alloy ideal until Meru and Chedi had opened her eyes to a different path, new possibilities. *Sometimes, it takes losing a dream to figure out what you really want to do with your life*" (Divya 389) (emphasis original).

The extract is quoted here to highlight the development of Jayanthi's cognitive schema paralleling her journey in outer space. The 'losing' of 'a dream' stands for distancing oneself from childhood ideals and identifications to form a fresh perspective of life and reality, in other words, to know what one 'really want[s] to do with' one's life. In this regard, Erikson suggests that the process of identity formation should be based on this fresh perspective, which relates to a conscious personal choice pertaining to self-image, rather than on the spontaneous development of personality influenced by societal ideals. The section focuses particularly on this aspect of identity formation employing Eriksonian notions of historical perspective, the event of identity crisis, and rejection of childhood identification.

The storyline of the novel states that to prove her theory of sickle cell genetic design's survival on Meru and to prove her worth to the whole universe, Jayanthi secures permission from the CDS and departs for Meru inside the body of an alloy pilot, Vaha. On Meru, both Vaha and Jayanthi fall in love. Their bond grows stronger, and Vaha lets Jayanthi use her artificial womb to form a fetus with her genetic design, which they later insert into Jayanthi's womb in order to prove its viability of natural survival on Meru. In this way, they could prove that her genetic composition could survive on Meru, and humans would be able to migrate over there. This will also provide humanity with the freedom to come out of the Earth and roam in the whole universe like alloys. Then, Kaliyu, who is Vaha's friend and possesses prejudicial disdain for humans, arrives in Meru's orbit with the purpose of invalidating the project for human settlement on Meru. To prevent Kaliyu's plans, Vaha grapples with him, is injured, and is left drifting in the open space

without any energy left in zir[24] body to control her movements. Jayanthi, without any knowledge of the abovementioned fight, is left alone on Meru's surface in bewilderment and agitation; she seeks help from two megaconstructs and eventually reaches Chedi, an enormous space-roaming megaconstruct, which was created centuries earlier for nomadic humans in the universe. Megaconstructs are "conscious, sentient intelligences who didn't think like living beings" (Divya 213). They are machines that possess independent minds with "different [arbitrary] goals than an alloy or a human" (Divya 213). It is on Chedi that she meets a bohemian group of humans—Sunanda, Guhaka, Raya, and Baby Hui, among others—who have been roaming the universe and living their lives in space for a long time. Eventually, Chedi takes her to the Nivid, where she presents evidence for the positive results of her project.

Erik Erikson, in his theory of identity formation, coined the term "identity crisis" to define a kind of requisite confusion about one's identity at the adolescent stage. It refers to a time when a youth is still in a state of doubt about one's sense of self and is exploring multiple possibilities of one's identity. Identity crisis occurs when, with the formation of a 'historical perspective,' the adolescent persona questions one's childhood identification and faces a type of catastrophic disentanglement of one's established belief pattern. Regarding the resolution of "identity crisis," Erikson writes:

> … youth must forge for himself some central perspective and direction, some working unity, out of effective remnants of his childhood and the hopes of his anticipated adulthood; he must detect some meaningful resemblance between what he has come to see in himself and what his sharpened awareness tells him others judge and expect him to be. (*Young Man Luther* 14)

Thus, one does not automatically resolve the "identity crisis," rather, with experiences and knowledge, one develops a holistic understanding of the past, the present, and the possible future direction, and then consciously forges one's identity and chooses one's "way of life" (Cote and Levine 99). In the novel, Jayanthi's central identity crisis occurs when she is left alone on Meru without Vaha's support. She begins to doubt not only Vaha's reality as a kind and lovable alloy but also her own. She begins to question the nature of her journey and whether it was sagacious to come to Meru. Being all alone on Meru makes Jayanthi skeptical about her own purpose, beliefs, and goals, as well as her reliability and relation to alloys, as suggested through her self-questioning and self-admonishing in the novel:

> *What is my purpose?* (213) (emphasis original)
>
> *Because of hubris. You thought you were so special, the child of alloys. You thought the rules wouldn't apply to you, that you could do more than the average human*. (212) (emphasis original)
>
> *Ambition and materialism lead to greed and exploitation*. She had been hungry for fame, for knowledge, for an experience granted to no other human being. And that had left her vulnerable to exploitation by the very alloys she'd looked up to all her life. (236) (emphasis original)

These quotes indicate a disturbance or a disentanglement in Jayanthi's established pattern of beliefs. However, when she reaches Chedi, experiences its life and mingles with its residents, she is exposed to alternate possibilities of human existence. She shares her predicaments and skepticism with Guhaka, the oldest residence on Chedi, and Sunanda. Their discussion on the human condition under the cultural hegemony of alloy ideals and superiority provides Jayanthi with contradicting opinions that further cause her to question her past convictions, as apparent in her following thoughts:

[24] Zie/zir pronouns are used by the novelist for alloys except when their incarns possess specific sexual organs.

> *Maybe Sunanda and Guhaka are right. Maybe alloys are just as selfish and flawed as humans. Maybe I don't owe my life to anyone else*. (271) (emphasis original)
>
> *Because zie* (Vaha) *doesn't really love you…. Alloys and humans can't have an equal relationship*. (276) (emphasis original)

These confusions and misgivings sign toward necessary tensions and the breaking of rigid childhood ideals. By questioning her past in reference to her present knowledge and experience, she is negotiating her beliefs and ideals in order to form a true historical perspective. After reaching Chedi, Jayanthi observes a different reality of humans; she encounters the utopian existence of a group of humans in space who have been dwelling there for a long time, roaming around in different galaxies. She observes love and care among them, as well as how humans on Chedi sustain a prosperous life in harmony with many mini- and mega-constructs. It provides her with a prospectus of the amicable existence of both species together on Meru. On the other hand, on her arrival at the Nivid, she learns about Vaha and Kaliyu's discord and how badly injured zie (Vaha) was that zie might never be found. With new knowledge and experiences throughout her journey, she forms a revamped 'historical perspective,' she comes to discern the ontological reality of alloys and humans (how they both are weak and strong in their own ways), the possibilities of their harmonious and equal existence (As observed on Chedi), and the dynamics of their mutual relationship (her own and Vaha's). This historical perspective leads her to reject childhood identifications, as apparent in her following words, "I spent all my time on Earth wanting freedom, to live like an alloy, to work like a tarawan, to have respect of spacefaring society. These last few months have taught me to look beyond that. Alloys are fallible. Constructs, too. You're not better than humans; you're just better suited to living with less" (Divya 377).

Both Erikson's and Turner's theories give significance to a certain type of detachment or separation from the parental environment, which provides a kind of unrestricted, unstructured, outside space for an adolescent to grow out of the endorsed ideologies of childhood. Without this space, without this freedom of thought process, a child cannot hope to achieve a personal identity but rather largely remain bound by the collective values of society. In the novel, the human species as a whole is stuck in this metaphorical childhood stage since they are not permitted to have that space to grow. Here, 'space' can be connotated in two ways: a) restraint on the psychological space by discouraging humans from having ambitions, desires, and goals; b) constraint on the physical space by criminalizing human movements beyond Earth's surface. Since Jayanthi, as a liminal being, is an exception and is allowed to experience the freedom of space, she successfully forms her personal identity. Moreover, this process of identity formation conveys the protagonist with the discussed parent-child perspective on the alloy-human relationship in her society. Thus, she resolves to free humanity from alloy's control and bring a revolutionary change in the CDS laws, as she emphatically evokes in her final speech to the CDS judges:

> Who decides when children no longer need constant oversight from their guardians? If our protectors… continue to restrain us in the name of misdeeds long past, then like overbearing parents, they are abusing their power. I believe that alloys have fallen into this trap. They insist that the only way for humans to *grow up*, as to speak, is to be like them—in other words, to evolve into alloys. I would argue otherwise. (Divya 394) (emphasis original)

Jayanthi's declaration suggests that she successfully resolves her identity crisis. She has truly formed a 'new perspective' of her own and declares it in front of the CDS citizens. This also shows signs of the psychological transformation in the worldview. In the past, she worshipped alloy ideals and their existence,

but now she feels proud to be human and stands for humanity in front of the whole universe. She has truly come out of her childhood ideological endorsement by rejecting her childhood identifications. This becomes a point in her life when the abovementioned "identity crisis" is resolved, and she enters into adulthood, possesses a sense of self, and has chosen a certain direction in life for future endeavors. Moreover, like *Meru*, in many young adult SF novels, such as *The Giver* (1993) by Lois Lowry, *The Maze Runner* (2009) by James Dashner, *Clone* (2018) by Priya Sarukkai Chabria, *The Island of Lost Girls* (2015) by Manjula Padmanabhan, and so on, the adolescent protagonists' identity formation goes beyond personal maturity. These narratives aim at the societal revolution and reformation with the emergence of their protagonists. In such narratives, revolutionary change often becomes a prerequisite for personal identity since the controlling bodies do not provide enough space for the protagonists to mature. Thus, we often encounter 'liminoid' protagonists in young adult SF texts, who are often stuck in the 'in-betweenness' of spaces, such as *Meru's* Jayanthi and Clone 14/54/G in *Clone*, who is a humanoid robot with limited capacities but due to a malfunction possesses the emotional and imaginative faculties of humans. For these adolescents, their liminoidality becomes a medium for their personal identity. They do not seek to escape their liminal spaces but rather solidify their identity on the grounds of their liminality and challenge the status quo. In this regard, Rhys Thomas argues, "the narrative impetus of those cultural texts which feature liminal protagonists is often provided by an individual's need to reverse the structurally negative characteristic…" (51). In the same way, Jayanthi uses her liminoid status to her own advantage to register her name to the Nivid by contributing to the existing body of knowledge so that she would be recognized as an accomplished individual and, in this way, would be able to "reverse the structurally negative characteristic" of her body. When she is tried for her crime of using an artificial womb without alloy presence or permission, she demands an amendment in the laws of the CDS for equal rights for humans and alloys. And, because of her evidence of human survival possibilities on Meru, the proposal for human settlement on Meru is approved; thus, she also frees humanity from their confinement on Earth, which represents a revolutionary change in the novel. At the end of the novel, Jayanthi is represented as an adult female, as she has resolved her identity crisis and has chosen her way of life by staying with Vaha on Chedi rather than Earth for the duration of her punishment. She accepts that "she hadn't accomplished everything she'd wanted to do on Meru" but also feels proud that "she had paved the way for others to continue her work. Her genetic design would form the foundation from which many generations would grow" and dwell on Meru (Divya 426). In other words, she successfully forms her personal identity in the denouement of the novel.

Conclusions

The concept of liminality advocates an inclusive culture in which marginalized people and communities, based on their gender, caste, color, body, or ethnicity, are not discriminated against and are given equal significance and treatment in society. To attach it to Erikson's psychosocial identity theory provides a more profound perspective on the potentialities of the adolescence stage, which, as a liminal phase of life, is a significant time for identity formation, as delineated through the analysis of the novel. Grounding upon these aspects of identity formation, the article successfully analyzed three facets of liminality in the novel: a) liminoidality as a potential site of reformation, b) Meru as a metaphor for lawlessness, chaos, and outsiderhood; a truly liminal space where freedom reigns for its inhabitants, c) adolescence as a liminal time which carries innumerable probabilities of identity. Further, the joint framework of inquiry, as employed in the article, is crucial and brings novelty to the article. Therefore, the study contributes to the fields of science fiction and identity formation by employing an ingenious and synergistic framework of inquiry to analyze an Indian SF novel.

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Monomyth, Mirrors, and Maddening Mothers—Otherized Female Identity in *Coraline*

Abstract: This article, which unites narratology, comparative mythology, and psychoanalysis, examines the ways in which mother-daughter relationships in a parallel world affect female identity in Henry Selick's *Coraline*, and how this process of individuation is replaced by the mythical heroine's journey. One of the cornerstones of object relations theory posits that the mother is the first object we ever internalize, and that this deeply affects the way in which we construct our reality and identity. Particularly, attachment becomes a necessary foundation for undergoing the individuation process and the creation of the self. *Coraline* presents a strong heroine living in a neglected and isolated reality. By using the mythographic feminist version of the monomyth—Maureen Murdock's Heroine's Journey—along with psychoanalytical object relations theory, a model is used to analyze and explain how identity is perceived and constructed in *Coraline*. To attain this new identity, Coraline will need to change the relationship with her mothers through "mirror/unmirror" phases and go deeper into the parallel mythical world where she can become her ideal self. Finally, this article ends with an explanation of Coraline's inner fight to define herself in both worlds and how this eventually leads to a less otherized self.

Keywords: Coraline, identity, monomyth, madness, myth-criticism

> Everyone wants desperately to believe that, in a world where love is so hard to find and even harder to hang on to, one kind of love is inviolable—a mother's love (Streep 11).

Introduction

The theme of motherly love has recurrently appeared in literature, unbound by genre and, instead, representing an idea of everlasting strength and unquestionable, unconditional devotion. From *The Jungle Books'* Raksha to the Harry Potter series, where Lily Potter's ultimate sacrifice out of love gives the eponymous hero of the history permanent magical protection, mother's true love has attained near-mythological status. As Dumbledore concludes, a mother's love is the strongest magic (Rowling 266). However, what happens when our heroines cannot count on motherly love and have to, instead, face reality with the grim realization that they may never be good enough to warrant their mothers' attention? This article approaches the issue of mother-daughter relationships in coming-of-age film *Coraline*, by Henry Selick (2009), and analyzes how those relationships affect her quest for identity, and how its protagonist needs to resort to a purgatorial world to escape her reality and find her true self.[25]

[25] General disclaimer note: the narrative, while not explicitly endorsing or condemning traditionally written gender roles, greatly lends itself to a psychoanalytical reading, which is often pervaded by sexist views regarding genderized models of parenthood. In this article, I make frequent references to the Feminine and the Masculine and their relation to canonically written gender traits because these are used by Maureen Murdock in her Heroine's journey mythographic model, but they do not necessarily represent my views on the matter. While I contend that psychoanalysis can sometimes offer great insight about problematic and otherized identities, I would be remiss not to mention that it needs to be revisited and remodelled with a more feminist approach.

One of the cornerstones of object relations theory posits that the mother is the first object we ever internalize, and that this deeply affects the way in which we construct our reality and identity (Goldenberg and Goldenberg 160). Particularly, attachment becomes essential to undergoing the individuation process and the creation of the self, since we both belong to an environment and become products thereof. As Adorno stated, "Not only is the self entwined in society; it owes society its existence in the most literal sense" (153-54). Indeed, not having one's mother's love and attention in childhood has often been explained by psychoanalysts like Sándor Ferenczi or Melanie Klein[26] to act like some sort of mythological sins of the father, where one event leads to traumatic consequences later in life, like ripples in a lake after disturbing it, and it affects the self by preventing one's quest for an identity. In "On the Development of Female Identity: Issues of Mother-Daughter Interaction during the Separation-Individuation Process" (1987), Anni Bergman explains that neglected girls cannot be fulfilled as women because, with a missing or unloving mother, the natural process of giving them up in an Oedipal phase could not be completed. This, in turn, leads to identity problems after early childhood, where they need to rely on and identify with their father instead. As she explains, the only viable option for unloved daughters—turning away from their mothers without giving them up—makes their bond "become noxious when the pathology of the mother or early traumas are such that the object representation of the bad mother of separation has to be carried along for ever after" (Bergman 395). Likewise, mothers have also been placed in a position of responsibility for their daughter's identity outside the clinical setting; in *Mothering the Self* (2000), Steph Lawler concludes that "[t]he mother is positioned as the guarantor of the self of the daughter" (56) and Rhona Justice-Malloy explains in her "Mothers, Daughters, Identity, and Impossibilities" (2016) that "it is necessary for a daughter to resolve mom issues [...] before she can work on her personal issues and identity" (220). Moreover, she concludes that the responsibility for those problems, from a cultural point of view, is always placed on the mother: "Mothers harm their daughters by being either too close or too distant, and this proximity is always determined by the mother alone. There is no mention of a daughter's shared responsibility for the intimacy of the relationship. Indeed, intimacy and proximity are to be overcome, as separation is necessary if one is to realize authentic identity" (221).

It is, thus, important to consider both clinical and cultural aspects when attempting to approach these issues of identity, since they exist in a dyadic status and as a result of a two-way feedback between psyche and society. The eponymous Coraline shares a problematic relationship with her mother, where she struggles to draw her mother's attention and affection at a critical stage of her development, and she resorts to a purgatorial world, where she can, instead, try to complete her individuation process through a different path: the Heroine's Journey.

It is important to note the most notable differences between Joseph Campbell's original Hero's Journey model, best suited for quests and external struggles, and Maureen Murdock's Heroine's Journey model, which was designed to best guide through a woman's struggle in society. Joseph Campbell first presented his narratological model in his *Hero with a Thousand Faces* in 1949, and it included a quest for heroes which generally started with a Call to Adventure—as he termed it in his model—saw the hero through several dangerous scenarios until he found the treasure that he had set out to seek, and ended with his triumphant return (36-37). This quest motif, nonetheless, does not often work well for the

[26] Although object relations theory has been subsequently associated to British psychoanalyst and author Melanie Klein, who provided the greatest contribution to the field, the idea was first theorised in 1917 by Hungarian physician Sándor Ferenczi, who introduced some methodological changes in psychoanalysis that entailed a greater focus on the patient and its history, along with more intervention from the analyst to help the patient, thus contributing to the foundations of modern psychology. Subsequently, object relations theory was also developed and contributed to by psychoanalysts like Harry Stack Sullivan in the 1930s, and Melanie Klein, Donald Winnicott, and Harry Guntrip in the 1940s and 1950s.

archetypal heroine, and Campbell himself did not seem to believe that heroines needed a journey at all, as he expressed in his interview about Murdock's model: "Women don't need to make the journey. In the whole mythological tradition the woman is there. All she has to do is to realize that she's the place that people are trying to get to" (Murdock 2). Therefore, using Maureen Murdock's Heroine's Journey model is best fitting for heroines in general. The latter model, just like Campbell's, serves to express the changes and struggles that an individual must undergo to become who they must ultimately be, but it shifts the focus to the internal struggle of trying to accept oneself, or one's feminine side, and incorporating external characteristics, skills, or ideas—the Masculine—which are usually imposed on the individual. This usually begins by having one's nature, beliefs, or interests challenged, to then going on to changing them for what the masculine side or external influence prefers. After that, the heroine must reconcile with her feminine side and incorporate both together in harmony. This model was developed to best represent the difference between a hero—whose bravery and determination might be challenged, but whose identity is seldom criticized or attacked—and a heroine—whose identity and femininity are often attacked and undervalued in a patriarchal society (Lerner 239; Rowbotham 30; Gomez 92).

The decision to use this model for the paper is based on the specific situation that Coraline lives, where her identitarian traits are often challenged, her identity almost always mistaken, and whose value and tastes are disparagingly dismissed, which makes her best analyzed through this narratological model. In addition, several narrative differences between Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* and Henry Selick's film also support its use. Namely, Coraline, in the film, is not suspicious of the Other Mother straightaway and embraces the Other Mother's world immediately. This lack of rejection makes the heroine's journey better suited to reflect her individuation than a traditional psychosexual development. Additionally, her parents are more negligent towards her needs and dismissive of her taste for gardening, which is central to her identity. The fact that this gardening is not only accepted but valued and taken up by her Other Father acts as a passage of recognition of the Feminine for Coraline. Ultimately, the addition of Wybie, Coraline's landlady's grandson, provides a much stronger disregard for the Feminine phase than there exists in the book, since not only are now her parents more dismissive of her taste for gardening and beliefs, but Wybie even mocks and ridicules her knowledge of plants and her use of a dowsing rod.

Caroline, the Mirror-*Unheim*, and the Imaginary Order

Coraline, first published by Neil Gaiman in 2002 and adapted to film in 2009, portrays the story of the eponymous heroine, a girl who struggles with her reality after moving out of her hometown with her distant parents, especially with her relationship to her mother, which is beginning to define her gender role expectations; Coraline, who is beginning to cement her identity, often sees aspects of her femininity disregarded by her mother. In *Coraline*, the heroine's journey is portrayed as a fight against a perfect mother, later turned monster, but it can be read as a symbolic representation of Coraline's inner turmoil, and the strife between the Feminine and the Masculine. Caroline's nurturing and feminine traits, such as her appreciation of gardening and living beings, or her witching knowledge, are first described as worthless on the surface, but, in the end, they are what ultimately allows her to survive. The masculine influence, on the other hand, such as traditional gender roles—like the expectation of a nurturing mother—and science, are first portrayed as superior but appear to be ultimately useless for her during her quest for identity, until she resolves her issues with her mother's dynamic.

Caroline,[27] at the beginning of the film, is firmly stuck in Lacan's Imaginary Order. This phase marks the shift of the subject from the Real, characterized by *need* (Lacan 94–100), which can be fulfilled, to a state

[27] The name *Caroline* instead of *Coraline* is frequently used throughout this section to represent Coraline's challenged identity, which stems mostly from the generalized disparaging views of her values that she perceives other people

which is ruled by *demand*, which must be mediated through language and signs to be satisfied. Caroline, having left the Real behind her, is painfully aware of her loss, the connection to her mother that needs to be resolved during the Oedipal phase of individuation. During this phase, a former object can become a subject in the mirror stage through appreciating their own self and separating themselves from their mothers, which starts the process of loss and the struggle with the Father for the Mother's attention and love. Caroline's parents, however, seem to pay very little attention to each other, just like they do to Caroline, which makes this struggle for the Mother's attention inviable. They are always represented in different rooms, hardly ever do they speak to each other in the film, and, when they do, the mother uses an aggressive and impersonal tone with Caroline's father. As Mary M. Leichty claims, "if the father is not available to play his role at this time […] there will be inadequate resolution of the conflict" (213-14). Caroline, in this stage, is portrayed constantly and unsuccessfully trying to attract her parents' attention and approval, and she, mourning the loss of the Real and her connection in the mother-daughter dyadic, expects satisfaction to be immediate. In other words, since she cannot accept *le-nom-du-Père*—the rules and restrictions that control her *desire*—she cannot evolve into subjecthood in the Symbolic Order (Lacan 67).

In this situation Caroline cannot undergo her individuation process due to an uncaring mother who devotes herself to her job and often shows disparaging views of her husband and daughter and a distant, careless father who does not show affection to either Caroline or her mother. From the beginning, Caroline's mother describes her desperate pleas for attention as pestering, claiming she does not "have the time for [her] right now" (8:50), and criticizes her interest in gardening, stopping her from going outside to start taking care of their garden, whereas Caroline wants it to be ready for her friends' visit. As she says, "can't believe it. You and dad get paid to write about plants and you hate dirt" (8:48), a conflict of values representing the dyadic nature of the struggle at hand. As Murdock posits, "If a woman feels alienated or rejected by her mother she may first reject the feminine and search for recognition by the father and the patriarchal culture" (27). This is the film's first Maddening Mother, a mother that pushes Caroline away and makes her mental health and identity suffer. Thus, Caroline is shown to often resort to her father to be given the permission that her mother will not grant her, or for him to appreciate her drawings and plants. Her parents, however, who along with Wybie symbolically represent empirical science and the masculine, write gardening books but are not interested in actual gardening and plants, whereas Caroline's nurturing essence makes her appreciative of wilderness and nature, and does not mind getting her hands dirty. Likewise, when she first meets Wybie, he mocks her "water witching" (5:47) techniques and her use of a dowsing rod, dismissing it as nonsensical, while also informing Caroline that she might get a rash due to using poison oak. Similarly, the themes of witchcraft and esoteric knowledge—representing Caroline's Feminine—are ridiculed throughout the film, and are quickly undervalued by Mr. Bobinsky,[28] who warns Caroline of the impending dangers prophesized by his rats, while also stating that the rats are, however, "mixed up" while pointing at his head (26:29), thus equating fortune-telling with madness. Likewise, the film portrays Spink and Forcible's use of witchcraft as merely the actions and

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to have, and from her name constantly being mistaken for somebody else's. Therefore, this section mostly uses the name Caroline while her identity is still challenged by other characters and her individuation process is unfinished, and then returns to using Coraline when she, finally, manages to accept her identity and to have other recognize her for who she is.

[28] Both Mr. Bobinsky and Mses. Spink and Forcible are Coraline's neighbors. They both supplement Coraline's parental roles in a symbolic way through their nurturing, caring dynamics and advice for Coraline, although they are often used by the narrative as well to challenge Coraline's identity—through constantly mistaking and mispronouncing her name—and Feminine—through the portrayal of traits canonically and traditionally associated to women by culture as initially inferior in the narrative.

ramblings of two senile ladies, even if they are proven to be right later on. On the other hand, the motif of Coraline's name is also brought up constantly throughout the film by characters who mistake her name and insist on calling her Caroline, like Mr. Bobinsky, Wybie, Spink, and Forcible, and it represents her incomplete quest for identity, which can also be seen in Coraline's attempts to find her own identity with her dyed blue hair or her wish to stand out among the other students when trying to buy orange gloves: "whole school's gonna wear boring grey clothes. No one will have these" (41:56), she says to her mother during the shopping scene. The lack of love and attention from her parents, the disparaging attacks on her interests by others, and the lack of a proper way to separate herself from others is what impedes Caroline from completing her individuation process. Caroline cannot accept having lost her connection with her mother and lives in a state of *demand*, in the Imaginary Order.

During the film, Caroline goes on several trips to the Other World, whose access is granted by her mother, and whose passage is a tunnel with strong yonic undertones and reminiscent of a vaginal channel. Indeed, Caroline performs a symbolic return to the womb—her first home—to go to a purgatorial place where she can hide from her reality and interact with a seemingly perfect family. There, her Other Mother cooks her favorite meals constantly, in stark comparison with her real one, and is appreciative of gardening and dirt, which she uses to cure Caroline's poison oak's rash. Likewise, her Other Father is shown to have designed a garden after Caroline's face, and likes to play music to entertain her. During the first trip, Caroline learns, however, that her Other Father's piano skills are controlled by mechanical hands and not his own, and he merely acts as a puppet. The scene ends with Caroline and her Other Family enjoying a banquet together which culminates with a cake that reads welcome home. These events present Caroline with a strong representation of the canonically enforced patriarchal gender roles in her household—giving her a chance to define her identity against the Masculine—, but also give value to her own interests, which could help her reconciliate herself with the Feminine, eventually. Caroline, thus, finds herself in a situation where she can be appreciative of a mother role which shows both nurturing and caring sides—something that Caroline is seen to appreciate in how she takes to looking after her doll—whereas in her reality she is afraid of becoming like her mother, who is aggravated when Caroline asks her why she will not cook, or when told by Caroline that her Other Mother would satisfy her every *need* without hesitation. It is important to note the symbolic significance of this Other House in Caroline's process. This house, which exists not only as an alternate reality for her but also as a perfectly *mirrored* one, is both her possible new home but also her *unhome*. Whereas this reflecting mirrored home might help her realize her individuation, as Hans Bertens says, "identity is constituted in interaction with what is outside of us and reflects us, it is *relational*—a notion that introduces the idea of difference into the process of identity construction" (135), it is also a dangerous and uncanny setting in the film. Caroline's home—Heim—exists next to a mirrored space, a mirrored counterpart: *the Unheim*. As David Rudd explains, in Coraline's "mirrored home, there's 'something very familiar about it,' although it is not 'exactly the same'" (4). This feeling of dread in presence of something that at first sight looks familiar but feels alien to us was defined by Freud as the uncanny, *das Unheimlich*, and is "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (3676). This situation, therefore, might initially be felt by Caroline as a place which leads back to her mourned mother-daughter dyadic in the Real. Her Feminine is valued, and she—apparently—comfortably sinks back into the Real.

In her second trip, Caroline is also presented with a banquet, and two of the wonders that her Other Mother devises for her: her Other Father's garden and Other Mr. Bobinky's jumping mouse circus. Likewise, she is accompanied to the show in the latter by Other Wybie—who has been "fixed" so that he could not talk and betray the Other World's true nature to Caroline—and there the mice recreate her name with their bodies. Again, everything in this world seems perfect on the surface for Caroline—as her Other Father claims, "mother said you'd like it. Boy, she knows you like the back of her hand" (35:59)—

and she finds both the love and attention that she lacks in the real world. This immediate satisfaction of all her needs puts her back into the Real. The Other Mother, by satisfying her needs instead of fostering independence, makes Caroline temporarily happy, but at the cost of the erasure of her identity. As Kathy McKay says, "girls are encouraged to maintain their dependent relationships to parents and family, and after marriage transfer them to husband and children" (as qtd. in Murdock 49). This marks her starting her passage through The Road of Trials (Murdock 47-60), a stage where the woman has to overcome the Myth of Dependency.[29]

The third trip is the first one that Caroline takes willingly—thus, conferring her with the essential agency for subjecthood—instead of in a dream, and it is also the first one where her Other Mother does not welcome her, but she still finds food on the table and new clothes that the Other Mother had woven herself. Here, the third of her wonders is presented, Other Mses. Spink and Forcible's show. Here, however, she starts her Illusory Boon of Success stage as designated by Murdock, the point wherein heroines find themselves limited by their erstwhile apparent success (68): in this third trip, indeed, the black cat warns her that her seemingly perfect Other Home is a trap. The black cat acting as Caroline's Goddess is also highly emblematic, since Caroline's Feminine is symbolically represented by her beliefs in witchcraft and wilderness, and being guided and protected by a witch's familiar further cements her feminine side, besides the fact that the black cat's role is to warn her about the Masculine, or the Other Mother's controlling influence. Likewise, Other Wybie's saddened expression, or the fact that her Other Father is constantly silenced whenever he says anything that might present a not-so-perfect image, give away the true nature of that world. Indeed, at the end of their dinner, her Other Mother says that if she wants to keep enjoying everything that she has offered so far, Caroline will have to let her sew buttons in her eyes, symbolizing her controlling nature, and cemented in by their idea that she would soon "see everything their own way" (52:45). This is the film's second Maddening Mother, a mother who, if initially apparently loving and caring, now shows her true intentions and nature due to her pathological dynamic, as opposed to the first Maddening Mother—Coraline's biological mother—who, if distant, detached, and critical of her daughter's identity, still cares for her in her own way. In this Myth of Never Being Enough,[30] Caroline realizes that her dream of finally receiving unconditional love and satisfaction of her every *need* was an illusion, and that she is not good enough for the Other Mother who, to continue to offer her love, requires the ultimate sacrifice: her identity. Although missing in the film, in this passage of the book the Other Mother claims "…If you stay here, you can have whatever you want" (Gaiman 138-39), thus offering to fulfil Caroline's every *need* instead of helping her complete her individuation process and accept that she might have unsatisfied *desire*. Caroline's rejection of the Other Mother marks the beginning of the "Strong

[29] Just like Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey's model, on which Maureen Murdock modeled hers, the Heroine's Journey comprises a cycle of eight stages. Maureen Murdock, however, was less strict in form than Campbell, and understood that an individual's particular life and contingencies necessitated a model which could explain how feminine identities are often challenged, and require healing, while allowing for the stage order in the cycle to vary and adapt to the narrative. For the sake of conciseness, I have opted not to explain every particular, specific stage, whose theoretical introduction would take too much space. Suffice it to say that the cycle begins with a challenge of feminine identity and traits, a subsequent identification with the Masculine, a resulting road of trials, a meeting with the goddess, who helps the heroine accept her value and womanhood, and a resolution and reconciliation of the Feminine and the Masculine.

[30] Maureen Murdock, profoundly influenced by psychoanalysis and its mythical explanations for identity problems and individuation processes—especially Jungian psychoanalysis, in her case—often supplemented her eight-stage model with different 'myths': In this case, I make allusion to the 'Myth of Never Being Enough,' whereby women, due to growing up with a challenged identity, often need to toil and fight to be accepted. In this case, Coraline's Other Mother's love is essentially contingent on Coraline's absolute, blind obedience and faith, represented by the Other Mother's request to sew buttons on her eyes.

Women Can Say No" stage through the "Myth of the Sense of Betrayal" (Murdock 71-73). That night, Caroline tries to unsuccessfully escape back to her world, and the Other Father momentarily warns her of the danger before being silenced by the Other Mother's controlling mechanical hands. Thenceforth, the Other Mother's true nature becomes clearer, and she starts using guilt to try to shape Caroline: "is that a way to talk to your mother? […] apologize at once" (57:47). Caroline is shut in a closet for her disobedience, where she meets the children that the Beldam—as the other children call the Other Mother—had lured in before her, and who had lost their identity to the controlling and narcissistic Other Mother's fantasy.

Back in the real world, where she manages to get to thanks to Other Wybie, she realizes that her parents have disappeared, thus marking her stage of "Initiation and Descent to the Goddess." As Murdock explains, this stage "is usually precipitated by a life-changing loss. Experiencing the death of one's child, parent, or spouse with whom one's life and identity has been closely intertwined may mark the beginning of the journey" (88). Caroline seeks help from her neighbors, but, again, the Feminine is here attacked by the portrayal of Mses. Spink and Forcible's esoteric skills. This time, nonetheless, they are also painted in a more positive light when they try to give Caroline advice and adopt a protective and informative role after presenting her with a seeing stone, which marks the beginning of the "Reconciliation with the Feminine" (Murdock 110). After their meeting, Caroline shapes a blanket to make it resemble her parents and crawls into that fort between them both, aware now of how much she actually misses them and being more able to value them for how they are, solving her "mom issues," as Justice-Malloy puts it, or accepting that her mother cannot always immediately satisfy her every *demand* (220). This realization and acceptation of *le-Nom-du-Père* changes her *demand* into *desire*, articulated by rules and linguistics conditions, and allows her to enter the Symbolic Order. From a narratological standpoint, this starts her stage of "Healing the Mother/Daughter Split," a phase where, as Murdock explains, a woman finally accepts her mother's nature (136).

Coraline, the Unmirror-*Heim*, and the Symbolic Order.

In this new stage, and back in her home, Coraline learns that her parents have been kidnapped by the Beldam after seeing them in a mirror, with the image of her mother finally giving way to hers and symbolizing her acceptance of the woman figure that she could finally grow to be. At this point, Coraline asks one of her mother's snow-globes—symbolizing a scrying orb, a symbol of witchcraft and her Feminine—if they are coming back, decides to adopt a protective role while relying on her initial feminine beliefs, and takes gardening tools, a flash-light, and her seeing stone—marking the beginning of her "Healing the Split between Feminine and Masculine" stage—before starting her quest (Murdock 171). In this fourth trip, she finally resolves her issues, reconciliates her feminine and masculine sides, and grows more appreciative and accepting of her parents, whom she needs to 'unmirror' from the mirror-prison. To do, this, she has to, as well, stop mirroring or emulating her parents' actions, which had so far been reflecting of their contempt towards the tastes that defined Coraline's personality, and embrace her own Self. She can finally move on from the mirror phase, pass from an object into a subject, and adopt an active role: she challenges the Beldam to a game where she will have to find the Beldam's previous victims' eyes—the identities that the Beldam had taken—and find her parents. In exchange, she offers to stay there forever, should she fail her quest. Now that Coraline has resolved her issues, having an identity puts her in a position where she no longer seeks to be a passive recipient of motherly love, but can, instead, express her love for her parents in an active way, and fight for that connection with all their flaws and virtues. During the game, she has to go on three quests—the garden, Other Mses. Spink and Forcibles's show, and Other Mr. Bobinsky's circus—for the missing children's eyes. Additionally, she needs to resort to both the Feminine and Masculine—her gardening tools, her flashlight, and her seeing stone—for the first two, whereas she is helped in the last one by her Goddess, the black cat. During her final fight with the Beldam,

now more aware of who she is and her strengths, she makes use of a newly gained capacity for deception to trick her, instead of, again, acting passively under her influence, and is aided by the other kids to escape. A remnant of the Other Mother's now weakened control over her, the Beldam's hand is severed when shutting the door of that yonic corridor—which connects the *Heimlich* and the *Unheimlich*—and starts chasing after her, but it is smashed with a stone and thrown down a well, thus symbolically representing the end of the individuation process for Coraline, where she finally manages to gain selfhood and freedom, essential to identity (Justice-Malloy 219). This is also cemented by her return into the world through the yonic symbol of the tunnel, like a figurative rebirth into her identity in the Symbolic Order, now ready to accept the loss of the mother-daughter dynamic in the Real and accept her new position as an independent subject in the Symbolic. In the final scenes, Coraline's dynamic with her parents mirrors the positive light of the mirror-*Unheim* Other World, she is shown as having accepted some of the masculine or external values of nurturing motherhood, as she goes around the scene offering food and drinks to her neighbors and parents, and they are finally also appreciative of Coraline's initial Feminine. More specifically, her mother finally gives her the gloves that Coraline wanted, and admits she was right and concedes that "the tulips look nice" (1:33:35). It is seen, then, how completing the individuation process not only helps Coraline have a better relationship with her mother. Indeed, the symbolic mirror phase that Coraline resolves in the mirror-*Unheim* house of the Other World by finally unmirroring her parents behaviors and finding her own identity also allows her mother to be more appreciative of Coraline's feminine side, and to take a new interest in gardening beyond Coraline's mother's initial, strictly theoretical, approach, thus also effectively helping her mother enter the "Healing the Mother/Daughter Split" (Murdock 136).

Conclusions: Coraline, Identity, and the Feminine

As mentioned in the Introduction, the problems with identity in this film revolve firmly around motherhood and agency. More specifically, for the psychological field, agency and independence from one's mother are key to undergoing the individuation process (Lawler 56; Justice-Malloy 221), and that issue is central to the plot of the narrative. However, giving up that dynamic with one's mother could not possibly help Coraline, since giving up an unloving mother cannot help one complete the Oedipal phase (Bergman 395), and one has to instead turn to their father for it. However, as Leichty explains, "if the father is not available to play his role at this time […] there will be inadequate resolution of the conflict" (213-14). From a psychoanalytical perspective, not being able to forfeit our mother's constant attention leaves the individual in a state between object and subject, and impedes one from entering the Symbolic Order, which is only possible when the new dynamic and *le-Nom-du-Père* are accepted (Lacan 67). For Bertens, there exists another factor: if identity is relational, one needs interaction with other subjects to stop being an object, something that Coraline could not achieve with her Other Mother. First, the Other Mother actively tries to stop Coraline with her insidious attempts to prevent her from resolving her mirror phase: "[m]irrors," she said, "are never to be trusted" (Gaiman 44) and as what game they should play (1:11:32). Second, the Other Mother treats Coraline like an *object*, not a *subject*; as the cat puts it in the novel, "[s]he wants something to love" (Gaiman 44; 79). It is, thus, impossible for Coraline to complete her individuation process in any of the traditional ways contemplated in psychoanalysis and psychology, and she has to rely on herself and her feminine side to find meaning and value in a patriarchal society.

Since Coraline fails to find a positive symbolic mother, she has to rely more heavily on her Heroine's Journey process and on resolving her inner fight. However, even though her process more clearly resembles Murdock's Journey, finding the Beldam also helps Coraline to, in a way, undergo a traditional psychosexual individuation process, since it allows her to gain a newer appreciation of her parents and their dynamic with her, and therefore to eventually move on from her mother after having established a

healthier relationship with her. Likewise, the relationship with her mother and her disparaging attacks about her beliefs, attitude and taste allow her to start her Heroine's Journey, which will ultimately help her find her position and identity, and what her parents' position and identity are in relation to her. The inward expression of her beliefs and values in her inside world of *need*—the Real Order—ultimately allows her to accept her reality in the outside world of *desire*—the Symbolic Order—, to go on her quests against the Beldam in the inside world again, and to complete her individuation process so as to gain an identity in the outside world. This process is also helped by the "unmirroring" of Coraline, whereby she finally accepts her nature and uses objects more defining of her identity to save her parents, instead of trying to mirror them, and by the process of group identity creation. As Hans Bertens explains, "we need the response and recognition of others… to arrive at what we experience as our identity" (135). This recognition is overtly symbolized in both Gaiman's novel and Selick's film when all characters, after Coraline's last journey, start calling her by her real name. Likewise, Coraline's helping her mother enter the "Healing the Mother/Daughter Split" stage acts as a feminist symbol whereby, through sorority, not only does Coraline manage to be more accepting of her feminine side in a patriarchal society, but she also helps her mother accept her own nature and feminine side, which makes the Heroine's Journey a transgressive narratological model which upholds feminine values and can explain how women can learn how to value and embrace their feminine side again in a society that systematically undervalues it.

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Prostitution in the Greek Cinema of the 1950s and 1960s: From Regulation to Socialization of Desire

Abstract: Cinema is not only a medium of entertainment, but it also has the power to reproduce, express, and shape ideas, ideologies, trends, needs, and concerns of a society at a certain time. The aim of this paper is to study the cinematographic representation of prostitution during the 1950s and 1960s in Greece, and to explore in which ways the films with this specific theme on the one hand are undertaking to shape a national female identity based on moral purity and on the other, to respond to the requirements of the social ethics and norms of the Greek society of that period. More precisely, it will be revealed to what extent the viewing of prostitution-related films contributed to the effort on the part of a post-war society to regulate and 'socialize' the sexual desire, preserve the family institution, and maintain social stability. The harlot-themed movies between 1950 and 1960 managed to meet various and diverse expectations, create normative models of social behavior, and morally 'educate' families, adults, and youth. The theme will be approached from a sociological perspective and will be based on three major theories on the social dimension of prostitution: functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interaction.

Key words: prostitution, Greek movies, desire, sexuality, social stability

Introduction

From ancient times, in every civilization, prostitution has been a controversial issue that had to be defined, delimited, and placed within a specific context. As a social phenomenon "coeval with society" (Sanger 35), harlotry bridged the gap between the public and private sphere, the sacred and the profane, being at the same time condemned and tolerated. Selling sexual services in exchange for money or other goods can be traced to the origins of human existence. While in the Judeo-Christian religion purchasable pleasure was both an acceptable and rejected part of the society, forbidden but also silently accepted, in Athenian democracy prostitutes constituted a distinct class. Apart from forming a particular and recognized social category, prostitution has always been connected to ceremonies and rituals taking place in sacred temples in order to honor a god. With the passing of time, human sexuality fled from the pagan, mystic rituals and Judeo-Christian religion's exclusive sphere of influence, and became a private and domestic affair.

Max Weber explored and analyzed the "disenchantment" of the sexual intercourse and the "temple prostitution" (602) which initially embodied the sacred, the occult, and the orgiastic of the "other-worldly" (349). Initially, prostitutes were respectable and honored practitioners of the "sacred harlotry" (343), and mostly seen as mediators between the earthly and the beyond during the ecstatic religious experience. The transition from a public-sphere sublimated sex, exercised mainly by prostitutes, to private-sphere eroticism, occurred as the social conventions were gradually increasing (Falco 16). That condition was the consequence on the one hand of cultural expansion and enrichment and on the other, of Occidental Christianity's hostility towards the uncontrolled sexuality related to paganism, frenzies, and sexual excesses. Carnal passion was associated with demonic powers, pre-prophetic religions, and the original sin of the fallen first created ancestors. Weber argues that the supremacy of the reason and the "inner-worldly," the estrangement from the peasant life and the focus on the economic interests of society,

exacerbated the distinction between the "brotherly ethic of salvation religion" and that of "sexual love" (343-345).

The image of the fallen women, perceived at the same time as sacred and deprecated, accepted and excluded, necessary and redundant, pure and immoral, has inspired the cinema since the time of the silent era. From Josef von Sternberg's *Der Blaue Engel* (*Blue Angel*) (1930) to Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Mamma Roma* (1962), Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), and Marshall's *Pretty Woman* (1990), harlotry continued to be a favorite topic for audiences all over the world. In the present article I propose a sociological approach to the representation of prostitution in the Greek popular cinema during the 1950s and the 1960s based on the different perspectives as expressed in the works of major social theorists and theories. Popular is perceived here both quantitively, as a product broadly liked or favored, and qualitatively, in the sense of a low-brow outcome functioning as a social status indicator (Storey 5-6; Bourdieu 192, 252), and more specifically as working-class marker.

Prostitution in the Greek Cinema of the 1950s: Towards a 'Functionality' of the Post-war Society

The beginning of the 1950s finds Greece politically and economically enfeebled. The end of the World War II had been followed by the bloodshed of a fratricidal civil war, and the Greek population—already afflicted by long-term malnutrition, diseases, unemployment, poverty, and high rates of immigration—had significantly declined. Various changes occurred in the structure and organization of society such as massive and intensive urbanization, and rapid modernization in all fields. Following the trends and practices of the post-war societies, and taking into account the audience expectations, the Greek cinema tried to satisfy the visual and emotional needs of the average citizen: "The countryman who took refuge in the capital in search of better fortune through his coveted petty-bourgeois settlement was the main consumer of the cinematic spectacle, as well as of other forms of popular entertainment and consumer goods in general" (Soldatos 69). Nonetheless, apart from fabricating fantasies of social climbing, perfect matching, ideal love affairs, success and financial recovery, the Greek cinema, complying with the social principles and political tendencies of the era, favored the melodramatic productions (Potamitis 224) which had been giving prominence to didactic purposes and to fundamental core values. One of the most important topics which served those pursuits was the role and the place of women in conditions of waning patriarchy and societal transformation.

During and after the German Occupation and the Greek civil war, the traditional gender roles had been reversed. Women were obliged to undertake responsibilities socially assigned to men in earlier times, integrate the dynamic labor force of the country, and explore ways to provide financial support for their homes. Mark Mazower, referring to the aftermath of World War I in Germany in his *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (1998), talks about a damaged patriarchy and communities with no fathers, phenomena that correspond to the Greek post-war society of that time. After the cessation of conflicts, men's absence from a deeply traumatized and devastated society had reached an extremely high rate, due to death, immigration, incarceration for political and ideological reasons, or because of war-related physical and emotional injuries. Consequently, the female population had to fight for survival in adverse conditions, deprived of emotional, financial support, and a secure family safety net. Unprotected, vulnerable and poverty-stricken wives and daughters had to be taught how to avoid malevolent flirtation or romance, and pre-marital bodily contact which could possibly end in sexual harassment, extreme exploitation, and finally prostitution.

Harlotry in the 1950s was projected in the cinema halls as a social phenomenon derived from defenselessness and extremely poor conditions of living. The fallen woman was always the one good-hearted and virtuous girl exploited and pushed out in offering remunerated sexual services, as an act of self-sacrifice, in order to support an illegitimate child: *Amartisa gia to Paidi mou* (*I Sinned for My Child*)

(Spentzos 1950), and parents in need: *I Agni tou Limaniou* (*Agnes of the Port*) (Tzavellas 1952), and *Kylismeni sto Vourko* (*Tumbling Down*) (Paraskevas 1956). It may also have been the woman whose future husband dies unexpectedly: *To Koritsi tis Amartias* (*The Girl of Sin*) (Athanasiadis 1958) or the one who earns a living with great difficulty as a streetwalker: "Aommatos" ("The Blind Man") (Tzavellas 1955). The way prostitution is represented in the Greek movies of the 1950s is interconnected with the economical and sociopolitical situation, the ethical concerns and orientations of that particular period. Cinema on its part facilitated the processes aiming at inculcating concrete moral values and practices of male-female interaction in the members of the post-war society, encouraging in an indirect way the "politics of shame" (Fischer 824) and the abstention from pleasurable activities. In a deeply politically and socially divided country, the film production during the 1950s was trying to find the common denominator of an audience with different social origins and divergent ideologies. The theme of the victimized, innocent prostitute made part of the mass appeal films, reconciling left and right-wing spectators for different reasons.

For the Greek leftists, the cinematic sinning woman was seen as an exploited victim of the free-market economy system which devours and strains the female proletariat, excluding her from any possibility of living decently. To them, those films served as a clear confirmation of Marx and Engels' theory in *The Communist Manifesto* (28, 29), in which they argue that prostitution is merely a byproduct of capitalist wealth accumulation, deeply subordinated to the division of labor within the working class.

As N.Y. Potamitis argues, the exploitation thematic makes part of the Greek social realities and is at the same time "supported by an ideological engagement with contemporary political struggles and conflicts" (220). The growing sense of disappointment and the loss of faith in progress, equality, and prosperity under capitalism resulted in what Potamitis calls "disillusionment" (220). This disillusionment emerged alongside postwar capitalism and is expressed through the stark dichotomy between ordinary people—used and abused—and the profiteering, ruthless patrons who exploit them. On the other hand, the Greek conservative and right-wing audience would attribute a woman's involvement in commercial sex to the absence of a robust family safety net and to the lack of a protective and supportive male figure.

The Greek cinema of the 1950s demonstrates a society in which kinship becomes the "central focus of the social system," playing a primordial role in membership, socialization, and the regulation of sexual relations (Parsons 108). Sexual intercourse must take place exclusively within the framework of a stable attachment of a man to a woman resulting in the family. Otherwise, not only are these relations morally unaccepted, but also dysfunctional. This is the case of a young girl in the film *Amartisa gia to Paidi mou* (Spentzos 1950) who, growing up as an illegitimate child by a stranger, dies accidentally at the hands of her father, without his knowledge, and while she is waiting for her mother to be released from prison. Her mother, a seduced, single mother, had fallen into prostitution and, having murdered her exploitative promoter, had remained in prison for years. At the same time, in *Agni tou Limaniou* (Tzavellas 1952), another illegitimate daughter of a harlot is also forced into prostitution as her father refuses to recognize her. Determined to avenge him, she becomes involved in a love affair with his adopted but favored and rival son. Filled of guilt and remorse, she attempts to commit suicide.

The post-war Greek society had to be solidary and operational, based on its most precious cell unit and driving force: the family. That is confirmed by the recurring motives in all the prostitution-related movies of the 1950s, summarized in the following:

A. Weak family structures
B. Extremely poor living conditions
C. Latent incrimination of intimate intercourses before and outside marriage
D. Debasement, abandonment and corruption caused by males
E. Disgrace, exploitation, marginalization and (auto)stigmatization of the woman

Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim considered sexual congress as an affair strictly between male-female, which was developed in order to assure social stability, moral order, and progress exclusively through the valorization of the family institution. Family, as "the true social unit" (Comte 502) constitutes an indispensable and determinant component of the social system destined to contribute to its seamless function. Marriage and the family institution presupposed the avoidance of promiscuity, and of any extramarital erotic involvement, in order to ensure not only the social system's equilibrium but also the progress towards what Durkheim calls "organic solidarity" in modern society (155). A solidary society is mostly and above all a conjugal society that is not able to function either with ephemeral unions or with external, partial, and temporary contacts (Durkheim 59). Comte's and Durkheim's approach favors a "gendered understanding of society" (Pedersen 256) aiming at regulation of desire (Pedersen 247) in which prostitution constitutes a blamable act, exactly as represented in the Greek cinema of the 1950s. Max Weber, besides, stressed that marriage was favored in order to preserve the family's possessions and protect the legal wife and the legitimate children's inheritance (344).

Despite the strict patriarchal and family-oriented structures of the Greek society during the decade of the 1950s, in films as in real life, the naïve, innocent girls who were engaging themselves in premarital sexual activity with their own consent were not considered to be corrupted or to have loose morals. As Efi Avdela claims in her book *Dia Logous Timis: Via, Synaisthimata kai Axies sti Metemfyliaki Ellada* (2002), their responsibility was limited, and the transgression of the encoded sexual norms was attributed either to the instinct of self-preservation in conditions of extreme misery or to seduction by the promise of marriage. The public projection of promiscuity through filmmaking is embedded in the traditional ambivalence and current functional perspective of harlotry as a rejected and, at the same time, tolerated condition. A despicable and yet necessary "safety valve" predestined to "absorb" the defects of the social system and the disorders of its members' sexual lives (Parsons 56).

Theorists of structural functionalism, such as David Kingsley, argue that prostitution as a sexual institution is functionally conjoined with society and essential for the viability of the social system (746). According to Kingsley, prostitution is a less respected institution compared to that of wedlock, as it does not generate legitimate matching and offspring (as for example in *Amartisa gia to Paidi mou* and *I Agni tou Limaniou*). Nonetheless, copulation in exchange for money, constitutes an "indeterminate, secondary and intrinsic" social function (748), based on contractual and economic grounds and it is exactly its contractual character that operates as a beneficial counterbalance to the marriage institution. Prostitution functions as a buffer that mitigates the disruptive consequences of unfulfilled, unsatisfied, or frustrated sexual needs, preferences and tendencies expressed within the social system.

The hooker of the Greek cinema during that period, but also in the next decade is interwoven with a world of deviant behavior (Parsons 56) which paradoxically contributes to the maintenance of social equilibrium. Prostitutes in the Greek movies of the 1950s were represented as suppressed, deprived of affection and emotional support, strongly condemning, marginalizing, and labeling themselves as deviant, in an effort to always protect their beloved person's reputation and save them from the public outcry. Aberrance or deviance is produced when social structures press certain individuals to such a degree that their acts do not correspond to the expected institutional and moral imperatives (Merton, "Social Structure…"-1938). It results from the incompatibility between the achievement of goals and the "institutionally canalized modes" (Merton 673) of attaining them: "Aberrant conduct, therefore, may be viewed as a symptom of dissociation between culturally defined aspirations and socially structured means" (674). Prostitution is thus perceived as a "strain" (Merton 681) derived from the conflict between culturally accepted aims and unpermitted or unacceptable ends to achieve them. The debauched woman in the movies of the 1950s is always in a state of "strain" and tension, trapped between the culturally

accepted aim of ensuring an income and gaining money from work, and the unacceptable condition of resorting to prostitution, in order to achieve that.

Promiscuity, as depicted in the harlotry-related films of the 1950s, but also in some of the 1960s, always results in women's and their offsprings' social stigmatization. Erving Goffman in his essay *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), argues that the term "stigma" is used "to refer to an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (12). It is socially defined as a mark that categorizes persons who carry specific visible bodily signs or other invisible but perceived attributes, rendering them socially unwanted and thus labeled, disgraced and marginalized. Goffman considers that stigma not only creates or responds to stereotypes, but it also affects mostly certain categories of people, prostitutes among them, who act, behave and shape their attitudes and self-image based on how society perceives and sees them. The Greek cinema industry of that time dictated, apart from the public condemnation, a severe self-stigmatized attitude on the part of the sinning woman, for whom murder, or suicide was filmically the most frequent and acceptable outcome. For example, in *Amartisa gia to Paidi mou* the seduced girl becomes harlot, as a social but also self-stigmatization result. In *I Agni tou Limaniou,* the illegitimate and unacknowledged daughter of a harlot is both socially and self-stigmatized as she is forced into prostitution in the port of Piraeus. Furthermore, in the film *To Koritsi tis Amartias* (Athanasiadis 1958), an ex-prostitute denies herself a 'decent and settled' life, and abandons her future husband, feeling filthy and unworthy. Sometime after, as they accidentally meet again, wanting to avoid him, she is hit by a car, and dies in his arms. Harlotry in the Greek movies of that time is not only a stigmatization, but also self-stigmatization and a self-punitive, sacrificial process, functioning as previously said, for the societal benefit.

There is a movie, though, in which the representation of the prostitute neither applies the established canon nor reproduces the standard motifs repeated in all fallen-woman-themed movies. It is Giorgos Tzavellas' anthology film *I Kalpiki Lyra* (*The Counterfeit Coin*) (1955), consisting of four short segments. The plot revolves around a 'rambling' counterfeit pound, a supposedly precious coin that changes hands all the time, demonstrating the way money shapes and determines human relationships. The second story, "Aommatos" ("The Blind Man"), depicts the antagonistic and problematic co-existence between a fake blind beggar and a streetwalker who argue over the appropriation of a public sidewalk and the claim of the passers-by as 'potential customers.' Their relationship becomes more intimate when the fake blind beggar, incapable of gaining profit from the counterfeit coin as all sellers recognize its non-authenticity, promises it to the streetwalker in exchange for one night with her. The no-value golden pound would be supposed to end up in the hands of a 'no-value woman' in exchange for impersonal sexual intercourse for pure pleasure so that the fake blind beggar would gain the maximum and the optimum profit from this fraudulent transaction. The ignorant harlot accepts only to be mad at him the morning after when she realizes that not only had she been fooled, but that the debaser had also lost the false coin. This short story proposes an alternative insight regarding prostitutes, embedded though in the stereotypic context of penury, deceit, exploitation, and manipulation.

The prostitute's image in this film diverges from the conventional category, in the sense that there is no melodrama and no information about the woman's past and reasons that turned her into a sex worker. The innovative element in the movie is that the emphasis is put on a more social and philosophical issue which is money's impact on people's life and interaction. Tzavellas' approach echoes Georg Simmel's essay, "The Typical Relation Between Money and Prostitution" from *The Philosophy of Money* (1900), and his definition of prostitution as a "fleeting" and "inconsequential" interaction that ends once the "monetary transaction" is completed (378). Prostitution is a purely biological and impersonal sexual act, bridging and equalizing nonetheless diverse personalities, class origins, and financial backgrounds. Simmel in his work outlines the affinities between money and prostitution.

Money as a medium for promiscuous intercourse strips the individuals involved of any affectionate communication, warmth, and further commitment, while in parallel, the fact that the one remunerates the other for the sexual services offered puts him in a position of power and control (378, 381). Simmel argues that in society, a woman's "sexual honour" (382) and money are very distant and irrelevant values for everybody else, except for the prostitutes, who only have a price, not value and honor. This rapprochement between money and integrity in the field of prostitution evokes for Simmel the fifteenth-century Anglo-Saxon system of *wergild*, the money paid as atonement, as compensation for a committed murder (382). By referring to *wergild*, the German philosopher underlines the devaluation of the prostitute's dignity to such a degree, that it can either be measured as any other fixed-price item, an indemnity for the suffered pain, or even totally unmeasured, unfixed and falsified as alluded to in Tzavellas' short story.

Prostitution in the Greek Cinema of the 1960s: Socializing Sexuality

The 1960s in Greece is a decade of contradiction and conflicts not only between the rival political parties, but also between the elected governments and the palace (Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece* - 1992) and the military coup of the Junta in 1967. Despite the political turmoil, Greece was experiencing a high growth trajectory of its economy, reflected in the modernized and westernized practices among which were mass entertainment and increasing consumption. In addition to that, massive construction and urbanization along with infrastructure investments and progress was constantly improving the quality of life (Delveroudi, "Ellinikos Kinimatografos…"- 2000; Soldatos, *Istoria …*-2020). The Oscar-winning movie for the best original song *Pote tin Kyriaki* (*Never on Sunday*—Jules Dassin) in 1960, and Mihalis Cacoyannis' film *Zorbas* (*Zorba the Greek*) in 1964, raised the country's popularity, turning it into an attractive tourist destination (Strain, "Snapshots of Greece…"- 1997), while additionally, in 1963, Greece gained international recognition with its first Nobel Prize, awarded to the diplomat and poet George Seferis.

For Eliza Anna Delveroudi ("Kinimata Neolaias… - 2010), as far as the cinema industry is concerned, alongside the rather marginalized and censored politically themed films, there was a rather prolific production of movies defying either purposefully (for political reasons) or unpurposefully (driven by economic motives), the governmental, constitutional and national crisis, prioritizing instead social issues and morally sensitive topics of public interest. It seems that cinema at that time continued to have a dual function. On the one hand, it worked as an agent of reconciliation and democratization, eradicating class and ideological differences, mostly for commercial ends, through the projection of "predigested" and "already integrated" (Adorno 179) film productions. Cultural products, such as American and Greek comedies or melodramas, had the magic power to "capture the consumers" and "provide them substitute satisfaction" (Adorno 181). On the other hand, despite being accused by the newspapers of corrupting the youth, as Efi Avdela stresses in her article "Fthoropoioi kai Anexelgtoi Apasxoliseis: O Ithikos Panikos gia ti Neolaia sti Metapolemiki Ellada" (2005), the movies of that time rather constituted a systemic component of the dominant ideology, intending to shape a "collective behavior" (Adorno 183), by exposing negative role models or anti-models used as egregious examples which should be avoided.

The spreading moral panic was a reaction towards a surface-level interpretation of the American and Greek films that featured bold, controversial, and socially inappropriate scenes. In reality, the Greek cinema industry played the role of a socialization agent, using those topics as an opportunity to raise awareness about the consequences of aberrant behaviors, and as a testimony for the repercussions of depraved practices which could possibly put in danger the family institution and social stability. This argument is confirmed by the stereotypic scenarios which always end with the punishment of the evil men (pimps, manipulators, nasty and violent men, and stepfathers) along with the parallel redemption or

atonement of the over free-spirited women or the one with inappropriate principles. Some of the most indicative recurring themes of those patterned scenarios are:

A. The nonconformist, rebel youth questioning the traditional structures of the Greek society, opposing the social and moral values, and openly exploring their sexuality
B. Families in the process of dissolution
C. Uninvolved or neglectful parenting
D. Women claiming autonomy, independence, emancipation, and the right to control their own bodies and drives

Contradictory as it may seem though, restrictions regarding the display of nudity or sexual activity in the Greek commercial cinema were gradually and partly lifted. The purpose was to sell as many tickets as possible by keeping satisfied the expectations, including the libidinal ones, of a mass audience in search of "popular entertainment" (Horkheimer 288). The representation of the prostitute was equally adapted in accordance with the structural—yet conservative—transformation of the Greek society and put in the context of a certain systemic functionality and nationhood. The plots of some movies in the early 1960s continue to revolve around the kind, compassionate and generous hooker who sacrifices herself for the sake of a dear person (child/parent/friend): *Skotosa gia to Paidi mou* (*I Killed for my Child*) (Athanasiadis 1962); *O Dromos me ta Kokkina Fota* (*The Street with Red Lights*) (Karagannis 1963); *Ta Kokkina Fanaria* (*The Red Lanterns*) (Georgiadis 1963); *To Katharma* (*The Rascal*) (Foskolos 1963), or the one who is to be married and then left alone and penniless, when her military future husband is declared missing in action, or presumed dead: *To Drama mias Amartolis* (*The Drama of a Sinful Woman*) (Athanasiadis 1961); *I Epistrofi* (*Return*) (Andreou 1965). The social origins of prostitution in Greece were still considered to be rooted in impoverishment (a version that satisfies the 'reddish' spectators) and in defective or dissolved families (a version that pleases traditionalists, rightists, and the church). The miserable familial and socio-economic conditions that favored the deception and exploitation of innocent girls constituted the main recurring motif in the prostitution-themed films: financial misery, unemployment, and indigence (*To Katharma*; *Ta Kokkina Fanaria*), motherlessness combined with inadequate or selfish fathers: *Trouba '67* (Grigoriou 1967); *Lola* (Dimopoulos 1964)]; inversely, fatherlessness combined with inexistent or selfish and emotionally absent mothers: *Oi Adistaktoi* (*The Ruthless*) (Katsouridis 1965); *Iliggos* (*Vertigo*) (Dalianidis 1963); *Stefania* (Dalianidis 1966)], orphanhood, and unaffectionate brothers: *To Koritsi tis Kyriakis* (*The Sunday Girl*) (Matsas 1964)].

With *Iliggos* (Dalianidis 1963) and *Stefania* (Dalianidis 1966), two mirroring movies with a similar plot, the social phenomenon of minor girls' sexual abuse by their stepfathers was introduced in the cinematic narrative discourse. This rather shocking theme for the mores and ethics of that period constitutes in reality a discouragement and a warning about the imminent dangers regarding children's safety addressed to potentially and already divorced women who are thinking of remarrying. Although seriously contested by youth and in great peril due to the women's international movement for emancipation and self-determination, the nuclear family still holds in Greece during the 1960s a prominent position. Consequently, the first two core patterns, analyzed in the previous section, as significant causes for a woman to be engaged in commercial sex—the absence of family, and precarious living—persist undimmed.

The innovative element of the cinema industry during this decade is that it offers to the Greek audience the opportunity to safely watch, observe and even enjoy the emergence of a fascinating community of outcasts and deviants, while the screen operates as the keyhole of a door to another world, close enough to be explored and far enough away to be irrelevant. From this moment onwards, there is a

change of focus towards the observance of distinct *personas* comprising an ignored microcosm. What appeals to the spectators is that this particular microcosm, sociologically speaking from the point of view of symbolic interaction, attributes different symbolic meanings to sexual behavior (Longmore, "Symbolic Interactionism and the Study of Sexuality"- 1998) as far as remunerated sexual services are concerned. These new approaches regarding the filmic representation of the prostitute brought into the light and added new repeated motifs such as:

A. The spatial limits and urban geographies of promiscuity
B. The intensification of the erotic capital
C. The social organization of the erotic underworld

In the movies, as in reality, prostitutes and the underworld to which they belong are isolated, and limited to specific regions such as the Piraeus port, the red-light district, cabarets and bars of Trouba, and a few underground clubs in Athens. The representation of a remote, deviant, and underground community living on the margins of society reflects the intentions of the law and the state to "impose geographical limitations on selling sex" (Hubbard 59), for reasons that have to do with social order, public health and "moral hygiene," as Dimitra Tzanaki ("Porneia kai …" - 2018) showcases (122). Those spaces of restricted erotic worlds, which provide sexual alternatives and channel the surplus of male sexuality, define in the Greek prostitution-related movies of the 1960s specific "moral geographies" (Hubbard 62), for which the ignorant audience need to be informed in order to be protected.

The physical sites that, in real life, functioned as sexual marketplaces for recreational sex were transformed on the screen into what Adam Isaiah Green, in his article "The Social Organization of Desire: The Sexual Fields Approach," describes as "social arenas" of "sexual sociality" forming "observable spatial nodes of a given erotic world" (28). It should not be bypassed that in Tzavellas' story "Aommatos," the stake between the prostitute and the fake blind man was for his encroachment on a street corner considered by the hooker to be the geographic borders of her own observable "erotic milieu" (Green 25). An erotic world is reserved "for sexual partnership and sexual sociality" (Green 25) where desire is strictly organized and expressed through particular codes of conduct and rituals. Some examples are the prostitute's or the procurer's right to choose the customers, the duration and the space of the encounter, the outfit, or the mandatory consumption of alcohol, the young boys' initiation to the sex life, as depicted in the film *Ta Kokkina Fanaria* (*The Red Lanterns*). This mission assignment to the most competent and highly proficient sex worker adheres to the prescribed codes of ethics and conduct, following the rules of the organization of sexual desire within a specific erotic field. An experienced harlot undertakes to teach what Foucault calls *ars erotica*. This art is understood by the French philosopher as "the procedure for producing the truth of sex" (57) taught by a master through the experience of pleasure which has to remain secret. And although Foucault considers that it was practiced in the old times not in Europe, but in China, Japan, India, Rome, and in the Arabo-Moslem societies, this term is used here to the degree that it corresponds not to the philosophical, but to the performative dimension of the introduction to a socially accepted and normative sexual activity.

Young boys' sexual initiation in the Greek brothels was traditionally meant to enhance manliness, to serve "heteronormativity" (Hubbard 27) and to construct a socially accepted gender or sexual identity, corresponding to the "dominant gender scheme… an ideology that, like all ideologies, serves to perpetuate inequalities in power and status." This schema states that: 1) "sex is a biological characteristic that produces only two options, male or female," and 2) "gender is a social or psychological characteristic that manifests or expresses biological sex" (Little 386). Space is an important factor as it affects and sets the context of the erotic and social interaction. For example, streetwalking offers independence,

autonomy, self-determination, visibility, and an increased sociability as in *Pote tin Kyriaki* (Dassin 1960), *To Koritsi tis Kyriakis* (Damaskinos—Miachaelidis 1964), and *To Katharma* (Foskolos 1963). Life in designated districts puts prostitutes under surveillance and severe control as for example in the film *Ta Kokkina Fanaria* (Georgiadis 1963). On the other hand, the work in cabarets and bars requires "bodies on display" (Hubbard 62) through dancing, singing, and drinking as we can see in *Lola* (Dimopoulos 1964)*; Kalos Irthe to Dollario* (*Dollar Welcome*) (Sakellarios 1967); *Iliggos* (Dalianidis 1963)*,* and *Oi Aggeloi tis Amartis (Angels of Sin)* (Katsimitsoulias 1966).

The overflowing female sensuality depicted through voluptuous dance, stripping, flirting, and a certain kind of outfit or nudity, becomes in the Greek movies recognizable evidence of promiscuity. Singing and dancing were the performing arts *par excellence* of the red-light districts in Trouba, constituting a part of the erotic entertainments, and offering indulgence and gratification of the sensual appetites. Art performance in those sexual arenas was put in a context of common and commercial prostitution, requiring women to be "the privileged objects of desire" expressing a "passive attitude" and exciting men's passion (Bataille 130-131). For Georges Bataille, the feminine attitude is equalized to prostitution, and reserves women to be the exclusive objects of male's desires, fantasies, and field of pleasures.

The filmic whore gathers the characteristics of a valuable "erotic capital," defined as "the quality and quantity of attributes that an individual possesses, which elicit an erotic response in another" (Green 29) or as "a combination of aesthetic, visual, physical, social, and sexual attractiveness" exercised on other members of society (Hakim 501). Some typical elements of the erotic capital are, among many others, special physical traits, sexual attractiveness, social skills in interaction, liveliness, social presentation (style, taste, clothes, etc), sexual competency, and playfulness (Hakim 500-501). The prostitute's gleaming erotic capital is depicted in the Greek films of the 1960s through intense make-up, stylish hairstyle, high heels, skimpy tight shirts, skirts and dresses, while on many occasions certain actresses do not hesitate to shoot scenes literally semi-nude, wearing tempting black lace underwear. Black, sleeveless, off-the-shoulder, tight dresses are the most frequent garments, "imbued with meaning understood by the wearer and viewer" (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 15). Clothes and cosmetics, but also non-verbal communication such as gestures and posture, are symbols that make the erotic interaction meaningful, helping the individuals to recognize and decode sexual behavior, or to "advertise availability" (Gecas and Libby 43).

Alcohol consumption in backstreet bars was an encoded and symbolic act suggesting bacchic rituals and ceremonies of initiation to the occult and orgiastic other-worldly (Weber 343, 349) as already mentioned in the Introduction, that also enhanced the erotic capital, directing and organizing at the same time the sexual desire and conduct. The motifs of singing, dancing, and consuming alcohol in bars where prostitutes worked were ambivalent. Those acts could be considered both as a "sexual behavior motivated by non-sexual motives," and as a "non-sexual behavior" which someone may be "engaged in for sexual reasons" (Gecas and Libby 41). Drinks may be offered either to "indirect sex workers" (Li at al. 191), hired in order "to promote and sell alcoholic beverages in bars and clubs through drinking with clients" (191), as for example in the film *Kalos Irthe to Dollario* (Sakellarios 1967), or to common women so that the transition into commercial sex with male clients is eased and facilitated (188). *Consommation*, the French term that has prevailed to describe the client's treat before the sexual act, aiming at increasing the profits in brothels, as Liopi Abatzi (2007) describes in her research, was a cultural practice (3) that flourished in Piraeus, mostly in Trouba during the 1960s. Specific artistic performances, flirting, stripping, along with the offer and use of alcohol, are persistent motifs in all the relevant films and serve to show the compatibility between cinematic and social conventions of that time, which opt for the projection of innuendos instead of the sexual act itself.

The persona of the pimp is very important for the social representation of prostitution in the Greek movies of the two studied decades, the 1950s and the 1960s. He is always the exact opposite of the positively qualified sinning woman and an antagonistic character, gathering on him all the possible negative features. Nonetheless, compared to the representation of the prostitute in the films of the 1950s, who is economically dependent but emotionally alienated and detached from the procurer, in the 1960s it appears that film scenarios insist more on the close and tense relations developed between the hooker and the pimp, ending eventually with the death either of the former, *Skotosa gia to Paidi mou* (Athanasiadis 1962); *To Katharma* (Foskolos, 1963), *O Dromos me ta Kokkina Fota* (Karagiannis—Karatzopoulos 1963), *Lola* (Dimopoulos 1964), or of the latter, *Trouba '67* (Grigoriou 1967). In some movies, the scenario focuses on the overreliance developed on the part of the procurer, expressed with extreme passion and obsession (*Lola; Ta Kokkina Fanaria; Trouba 67*). It is quite notable though, that in a few films, there is an excessive emotional dependence of the hooker on her pimp, turning the interest to the micro-level and psychosocial approach of the prostitute (*To Katharma; Ta Kokkina Fanaria; Stefania; Iliggos*). Simmel explains the paradoxical and unusual attitude of the promiscuous woman, stressing that venal sex has a degrading effect over women who offer "the totality of themselves," whereas men offer "only a part of their personality" (381). The German philosopher claims that it is exactly between this unfilled emotional void and unsatisfied needs experienced by prostitutes that procurers take their place and are tolerated as a "substitute relationship in which at least some other qualities of the partner are involved" (381).

The procurer or extortionist in the 1950s and 1960s cinema is also portrayed as someone capable of either maintaining or disrupting what Erving Goffman, in *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (1967), describes as the "face" of others and the "expressive order" established within the devalued microcosm they inhabit (9). According to Erving Goffman: "the term *face* may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself… during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes—albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself" (5).

According to Goffman, "face" offers a person self-confidence, self-respect, pride, honor, respect, and dignity. When the necessary conditions and parameters required for someone's face, that is the positive value attributed to someone, are no longer sustained, the so-called "expressive order" is deregulated, and the interaction is either put at risk or failed (*Interaction Ritual* 19). The pimp or the cheater in the Greek movies of the 1960s can make a prostitute "maintain face," (*Interaction Ritual* 6) that is to help her act consistently according to the set of meanings that are appropriate and commonly accepted by other agents in a given interaction. He has also the possibility to put her in a situation of "wrong face," "out of face," (*Interaction Ritual* 8) or "shamefaced," (*Interaction Ritual* 9) which means he can embarrass, degrade and humiliate her by ruining what Goffman calls the "line," that is "a pattern of verbal or nonverbal acts by which [someone] expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants especially himself" (*Interaction Ritual* 5). Such an example is the pimp's revelation of the prostitutes' secret real life and profession (*Skotosa gia to Paidi mou, Ta Kokkina Fanaria*), the tempting offer of money to the hooker who abandons the decent but poor life and returns to Trouba (*Trouba '67*), or the ex-delinquent deceived by his gang, who takes care of his supposed mother, an ex-hooker employed by his rivals in order to abase him (*Oi Adistaktoi*).

Conclusions

The fallen-woman-themed film production during the 1950s was limited but quite notable, expressing the priorities of a modernized society that had to be developed and reproduced within the framework of

social cohesion and normativity. Safe women's entrance into the labor force and family stability were issues of importance which, according to the dominant moral rules and values system, required a regulated sexual behavior and control of the erotic desire. As the patriarchal model was put in crisis after two disastrous wars, feminine virtue and the family institution had to be protected and preserved. At the beginning of the 1960s, only a few of the numerous films maintained this pattern, as a result of the paradigm shift from the macro-level anxieties to the micro-level disquiets, introduced by the pioneer story "Aommatos" from Tzavellas' film *I Kalpiki Lyra*. Willfully or through subconscious awareness, the representation of prostitution and the symbolic meanings with which it was charged through honor/shame dichotomies (Potamitis 214), paved silently the way towards sexual education and socialization not only of the youth but also of the adults.

The representation of prostitution during the decade of the 1960s continues to play an instructive role echoing the requirements of the Greek society which, despite its modernization, remains a deeply conservative and traditional nation with regards to women's virtue and virginal honor. The depiction of the delinquent and promiscuous erotic world of Trouba and Piraeus port is mostly focused on the permanent and timeless "male demand for erotic entertainments" (Hakim 9), and on the way this demand is socially organized. The projection of symbolic interactions and practices taking place in the sexual market provides precious information as far as the dangers and the consequences of casual sex are concerned in the Greek male-dominated culture. The cinema industry implicitly indicates the need for protective measures and vigilance on the part of the women, who should learn to repress their sex drives and sexuality, serving the functional pursuits of the society, that is the prioritization of the familial honor and bond, along with what Giuseppe Benagiano and Maurizio Mori, describe as the "conjugal procreational," (55, 56) and not the premarital recreational sexual intercourse.

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Shakespeare's Glocal Moorings: Transculturation in Two 2001 Celluloid Adaptations of *Othello*

Abstract: This article examines two film adaptations of Shakespeare's *Othello* released in 2001, Geoffrey Sax's telefilm *Othello* and Tim Blake Nelson's *O*, from the perspective of Fernando Ortiz's concept of transculturation, focusing on how ideas about race, gender and sexuality are translated from Shakespeare's text with its own historical situatedness, and transformed in two contemporary—coeval but contrasting—adaptations of it, one British and one American. The Early Modern category of "Moor" is adapted and expressed in these millennial productions in terms of the inter-Atlantic slave trade, because the violence and hybridity associated with it has made it a template for the transculturation of interracial relations in general and *Othello* in particular.
The films allude to contemporary events to illustrate or re-interpret Shakespeare's plot, including events of race-related violence such as the O. J. Simpson murder case, and of teenage violence like the Columbine High School massacre. The white homoerotic gaze on Othello's black body is underscored in both films, and the counterparts of Iago perceive the counterparts of Othello as attractive alter-egos rather than enemies. I argue that the transculturation of race in the two films establishes Shakespeare's *Othello* as a text with "glocal" cultural capital.

Keywords: *Othello*, Shakespeare, transculturation, adaptation, glocal

Introduction

> "[Capitalist economic theory] defines as disinterested those forms of exchange which ensure the *transubstantiation* whereby the most material forms of capital—those which are economic in the restricted sense—can present themselves in the immaterial form of cultural capital or social capital or vice versa." (Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" 16)

> "Shakespearean cultural capital now moves freely from investment to investment, from one cultural arena or medium to another, in a search for renewed value. That value accrues from a process of reciprocal legitimization, whereby Shakespeare's association with a mass-cultural product, medium, or genre lends that item a moiety of highbrow depth, 'universality,' authority, continuity with established tradition, or seriousness of purpose, while at the same time the association with mass culture lends Shakespeare street credibility, broad intelligibility, and celebrity." (Douglas Lanier, "Recent Shakespeare Adaptation and the Mutations of Cultural Capital")

Shakespeare—the name, the author-function and the corpus of work it subsumes—is undoubtedly the most canonical legacy of early modern England. At a time when the country was emerging as an imperial capitalist powerhouse in the changing socio-economic scenario, Shakespeare's plays functioned both as sites where the global network of power left its traces, and as merchandise to be disseminated to the colonies and throughout Europe as cultural capital legitimizing English hegemony. The idea of transculturation, coined and employed by Fernando Ortiz primarily in the context of the trajectory of material merchandise like tobacco and sugar (97), can also be applied to the much-documented history of

such a cultural or textual merchandise, its implications and implementations, receptions and "recodifications" (Parmar 24). This article attempts to trace the bidirectional economy of influence and interpretation between Shakespeare's *Othello* and two of its twenty-first century screen adaptations, both released in 2001, exploring how it constitutes cultural dialogues. The post-modern dissolution of boundaries between 'high' and 'low' or popular culture that is the prerequisite of most mainstream English films based on Shakespearean plots contributes to this mutual legitimization that Douglas Lanier points out in the above quote. The film industry deploys the cultural capital of Shakespeare to "transubstantiate" it, as Bourdieu puts it, into economic profit—a process involving translation, translocation, transmediation, and a pervasive participation in deliberate or received transculturation.

This article examines two twenty-first century film adaptations of *Othello*, Geoffrey Sax's telefilm *Othello* and Tim Blake Nelson's *O*, from this perspective, focusing on how ideas about race, gender and sexuality are transculturated between Shakespeare's text, with its own historical situatedness, and two contemporary—coeval but contrasting—adaptations of it, one British and one American. Both were released in 2001, and both "used the play to discuss racial and sexual tensions in enclosed contemporary communities: London's embattled police force and an elite American college" (Howard 314). Remembering Bourdieu's observation that "the most powerful principle of the symbolic efficacy of cultural capital no doubt lies in the logic of its transmission" (19), I shall explore the effect of cultural stereotypes and media myths on the central characters of both these films. In his discussion of racial perception in millennial youths, Henry Giroux borrows Derrida's concept of "performative interpretation" to argue that self-perception cannot be separated from representation by others (Giroux 14). Shakespeare's Othello performs his actions because he consumes an interpretation of his race that degrades but influences him. In the films I study, the situation is further complicated by these representations themselves being interpretations of Shakespeare's representation of homologous issues in his time. The term "performative transculturation" (Sen 5) has been coined for such scenarios, which corroborate Marjorie Garber's statement: "Shakespeare makes modern culture and modern culture makes Shakespeare" (xiii).

Othello (2001) by Geoffrey Sax

Along with *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, *Othello* (c.1603-1604) is one of Shakespeare's four greatest tragedies, and consequently a pillar of what most critics take to be the pinnacle of Shakespeare's dramatic art. In recent years, many filmmakers have re-contextualized his works into different contemporary settings, both in the West and in the Global South, in an attempt to make his work more accessible to contemporary audiences. This section attempts to examine Geoffrey Sax's telefilm *Othello* (2001) in terms of its interpretive agency in (re)reading its canonical original, and modifying the perception of that original by the contemporary audience. Noticeably, this film deploys a contemporary British racial and sexual framework to relate to Shakespeare's Elizabethan text, and at the same time, incorporates the queer readings of Shakespeare that gained ground at the turn of the twenty-first century. Taking Shakespeare's *Othello* into a territory where high tragedy travels towards realistic drama, the film re-invents the characters' motivations, clearly conveyed to the audience, leaving less room for ambiguity, and adapts Shakespeare's language into a contemporary idiom. This celluloid representation, along with its American contemporary, serves not only as a litmus test for the width and depth of the racial divide that prevails in each society but also portrays the "explosively racialized politics" (Hodgdon 94) prevalent in different twenty-first century cultural landscapes.

Sax's televisual retelling of *Othello* (2001) as a racially charged British police procedural seemingly becomes a means by which Sax aims to effectively gauge the corrosive possibilities of an apparently progressive society. An LWT production, it

> …uses Shakespeare's plot to interrogate the explosively racialized politics surrounding the history of Stephen Lawrence, a black teenager brutally beaten and murdered by racist thugs at a bus stop in Eltham, south-east London, in 1993. The original investigation was bungled, and none of the five white men widely suspected (and publicly accused) were convicted; an official enquiry, prompting resignations high up within the Metropolitan Police, accused the police of institutionalized racism and violence […]. (Hodgdon 94)

The film directly alludes to the incident. In an interview, Andrew Davies, the scriptwriter of *Othello* (2001), spoke of how the Lawrence case gave him the idea of making his John Othello the first black commissioner of London Metropolitan Police, thereby also mounting a tangential critique of the government's cynical administrative strategies, especially in making bold gestures that will play well in the media (Hodgdon 95).

The film posits the process of transculturation in the transformation of the feudal military general, the "thick-lipped Moor" as illustrated by Shakespeare, to the strong-willed, dark-skinned London cop, John Othello, defending a liberal-democratic state apparatus. He is promoted to the rank of the Metropolitan Police Chief after successfully quelling a racial riot provoked by the death of the black Billy Coates in the hands of white policemen. Enraged at being passed over by his own protégé, the hypocritical and deeply racist Ben Jago (analogous to Shakespeare's Iago) swears vengeance on Othello and persuades him that his wife Dessie (Desdemona) is committing adultery with her white police bodyguard, Michael Cass (Cassio), with the result that the insanely jealous John Othello smothers his wife to death before killing himself and leaving Jago to inherit the Commissionership that the latter regards as rightly his. Interweaving the features of Shakespeare's plot with parallel incidents of modern-day London which smack of racial violence, Sax fashions a double narrative—half Shakespeare and half police procedural—that resituates Othello's story within a racially saturated field of visibility (Hodgdon 95).

Jago seems to break the "fourth wall" (T. Brown 3) and almost take the audience into confidence by his direct, intimate asides and voice-overs. Although Jago, a representative of the white supremacist society, dismisses the idea that politics or racism has anything to do with "love," the statement proves to be quite misleading as the film goes on to reveal how the conjugal relation between Othello and Dessie is ruined by the former's race-consciousness and the anxieties begotten by that; more importantly, it is John Othello's promotion into a position until now preserved for the privileged whites that subverts the existing hierarchy in the Othello-Jago relationship and casts a strongly negative impact on the "love" that Jago claims to have for his former protégé. In a rageful monologue, the latter exclaims: "I loved you, John, I did—when you were halfway down the greasy pole... But now, how can I love you now?" (*Othello* 21:10). Jago's asides are adapted as direct addresses to the audience. After a scene in which Othello alarms Dessie by trying to violently attack Michael Cass, Jago turns to the camera in a close-up even in the presence of Othello, Dessie, and Lulu (the counterpart of Emilia), and tells the audience: "So what do you think? I know, I feel it too. I'm almost sorry I started it. Too late now. He's up and running. It's beyond my control" (*Othello* 75:42). This echoes Iago's aside in the play, also uttered in close proximity to the same set of characters: "The Moor already changes with my poison... Look where he comes. Not poppy nor mandragora / Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world / Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep / Which thou owedst yesterday" (Shakespeare 3.3.328-336).

In Shakespeare's play, from the very beginning, Othello has been depicted as an already established military leader of the Venetian state; his proven merit and magnificence qualify him as the only man who should be given the onus of defending the Venetian colony of Cyprus against the infidels or the Turks. Lauren Maguire notes the duality between Venice and Cyprus in Shakespeare's *Othello*—the former standing for legal authority while the latter, the birthplace of Aphrodite (who is also called "the Cyprian": see, for example, Euripides 36), stands for love, freedom, and encounters with the Turks; but she remarks that it might not be "necessary" to keep the duality of location in adaptations, citing Guiseppe Verdi's 1887 opera adaptation, which is set entirely in Cyprus (Maguire 10). The films we study in this article are also

set in single locations, thus stressing the locality of the cultural codes at play. But Virginia Mason Vaughan, in the opening chapter of her book *Othello: A Contextual History* (1994), sets out an important case for acknowledging the particular implication of the play's original settings and argues: "Cyprus's geographical and political position mirrors Othello's psychic situation. Like Cyprus, Othello can be colonized by Venice—he can be put to use. But he can never be wholly Venetian. This liminal positioning makes him vulnerable to Iago's wiles…'' (22).

This observation seems to be true for Sax's Othello, too. An efficient police officer, he is also the one black face in a sea of white officials listening to a speech that calls for the recruitment and promotion of more Asian and black officers within the British police force: a factor that undoubtedly explains why John Othello is the one who is summoned to contend the black rioters at Downing Street (Cartelli and Rowe 127). He deftly quells the riot provoked by the beating-death of the black Billy Coates by white policemen, by identifying himself as one of the members of London's black community and promising to deliver them "justice under the law" (*Othello* 10:07); the patriotic music that forms the background score to Othello's valiant speech before the rioting crowd seems to emphasize the sincerity of his words and his commitment to the job. Thus, he gains prominence as the gatekeeper of British law and order—a gatekeeper who, owing to his race, can negotiate with the black minority of London, and thus is chosen to be put to "use" by the British authorities for performing public idealism with a black face and in black voice (Cartelli and Rowe 129). This seems to be precisely the reason behind the promotion of Othello to the position of the new Commissioner of Police, which is also informed by the need of providing assurance to the public about the Met's (London Metropolitan Police) anti-racist stance and its capacity to bring its racially-prejudiced, renegade officers to justice. John Othello's promotion appears to be a "borrowed robe" (Cartelli and Rowe 129), one which is invested on him as a stance to facilitate public relations in contemporary London.

When Ben Jago (Christopher Eccleston) learns that he has been superseded by his former apprentice Othello (Eamonn Walker) for the post of the police commissioner, he maintains a hypocritical appearance of gladness before the latter, and hugs Othello after congratulating him with a friendly expression, "You clever big black bastard" (*Othello* 19:31). These words, however, are actually markers of the deep resentment that Jago now harbors against Othello, whose promotion he considers illegitimate, as it is facilitated not so much by the latter's merit as by his race. This is followed by one of Jago's remarkable asides, as he propels himself into the office hallway with histrionic abandon, spitting out his rage and crying, "It should have been me!" and, in a mocking ventriloquized version of Othello's voice, proclaiming, "I am just a token handsome nigger." Being deprived of what Jago considers a highly deserved promotion, all of his so-called "love" for his former protégé evaporates when Othello is no longer his subordinate "halfway down the greasy pole" (*Othello* 21:10).

In Shakespeare's play, Iago's resentment at Othello's promotion of Cassio as a lieutenant has a double focus: envy of the gentlemanly Cassio and vindictiveness against Othello. This leads to Iago's plot which eventuates in Cassio's degrading (and the consequent appointment of Iago in his place) and then results in the destruction of Othello's marriage. By contrast, Sax's *Othello* prominently displays the initial failure of Jago's plot to succeed to the position of the discredited commissioner, Sinclair Carver, who is expelled after being exposed by the tabloids for making racist comments. For a position that Jago has coveted for himself—so much so that he even goes to the extent of planting a spy in the men's restroom who records the racist comment that Jago elicits from the erstwhile commissioner during a casual conversation—to be passed over, that too to an officer "of color" who has been his own former protégé, seems too much for Jago to endure. For a film which graphically focuses on the fatal, unprovoked beating of a black suspect by four white policemen, three of whom are represented as confirmed racists, his rage itself is symptomatic of a vicious cycle (Cartelli and Rowe 125). Thus, it seems that Jago's animosity towards Othello can be granted the same rationale of race-based resentment as the otherwise unmotivated violence inflicted by

the racist policemen on Billy Coates, the black guy who is apparently suspected to be a drug peddler—a suspicion which is in line with to the stereotypical ideas of criminality that are often associated with black men. Jago's rage also seems to chime in well with the bitterness conveyed through the racist comment of the erstwhile Police Commissioner, i.e., the resentment at the assumed privileges and undeserved sympathy British minorities apparently enjoy owing to the hypocritical ministrations of the upper-crust Labor Party liberals (Cartelli and Rowe 125).

Later in the film, in shots intercut with Dessie and Othello making love, Jago is found accessing a White Bunker chat room and sending off a message, which is imaged only in fragments: "jungle bunny… commissioner… white tart… wife" (*Othello* 27:20). The racist rhetoric of the message seems reminiscent of Iago's words in Shakespeare's play text, where the former describes to Brabantio the sexual union between Othello and Desdemona: "an old black ram/ Is tupping your white ewe" (1.1.87-88). However, in Sax's film, this maneuver of Jago leads to neo-Nazi thugs threatening Dessie, thus prompting Othello to ensure police protection for his wife, and thus giving Jago the opportunity to bring Michael Cass into the scenario and use him as a pawn to destroy Othello's marriage and ruin his peace of mind forever.

John Othello's racial identity not only affects his public life, like his tokenistic promotion, but also seems to dominate the attitude of his beloved Dessie (Keeley Hawes) towards him. After Othello returns from his public triumph of quelling the riot to the privatized space of his and Dessie's room, one of the awards that await him is a gift that seems to oddly resonate with the already cultivated impression of Othello's racialized celebrity (Cartelli and Rowe 128). As Othello reluctantly accepts from Dessie—and tries on—a golden-colored silk robe, he seems to experience some degree of discomfiture and embarrassment, as he remarks: "I always think of silk being a girl thing" (*Othello* 11:32). As John Othello dons the golden silk robe, looking like an exotic African prince, his appearance seems reminiscent of Shakespeare's Othello, the Moor of Venice. As the golden-robed John Othello looks at himself in the mirror and speculates with a degree of awkwardness on his reflection, Dessie is found gladly gazing at his mirror-image and even remarking that the "look" Othello assumes in his golden robe is "absolutely you" (*Othello* 11:43). This brings home the fact that the degree of awkwardness Othello experiences with this "look" partly stems from his anxiety that Dessie has begun to exoticize him, deriving pleasure from his image as an extravagant stranger, rather than someone who was "born here" and "went to school here" in metropolitan London (*Othello* 7:51). Recurring eroticization and fetishization of the black male body become prominent through the pool-side encounters between Othello and Jago, where the latter surreptitiously sows the seeds of suspicion and jealousy in Othello's mind through his suggestive remarks about Dessie's relationship with Cass. During both the pool-side meeting scenes—first, when Jago suggests the probable infidelity of Dessie, and second, when he confirms her adultery on the basis of the fabricated DNA proof—both occasions depict a fully-clothed Jago conversing with a nearly nude Othello. This contrast seems to hint at the white man's fascination with the black male body, which is objectified and showcased to cater to the fancy of the supposedly white audience, with whom Jago has apparently established such rapport that they have not only become complicit in his racism, but also shared his grievance: Jago is found directly addressing the camera and asking his audience to "Cheer up" (*Othello* 21:49). This sexual objectification of the black male body is also evident from the racially-prejudiced comment of the erstwhile white Police Commissioner who remarks that the black officers "lack brains as big as their dicks" (*Othello* 4:55). The nudity of the black man's body may also be an indicator of the vulnerability of the black man's mind, as the all-trusting Othello easily falls prey to Jago's crooked insinuations.

The reflecting pool provides the perfect medium for Othello to screen his anxious projections, one of which shows the naked body of Cass reaching out to him or to that of the barely-clothed Dessie. While the latter image is merely a projection of Othello's growing suspicion and jealousy, the former seems to have a homosexual underpinning to it: the extent to which Cass's arms "seem to reach out to John [Othello]

correlates in suggestive ways both with Iago's recounting of the night he spent sleeping beside the dreamily aroused Cassio in Shakespeare's play and with the homoerotic undertow of the series of poolside conversations John has with Ben [Jago]" (Cartelli and Rowe 134). Othello's suspicion about Dessie's adulterous relationship with Cass is reiterated when he finds Cass wearing the silk robe that he himself wears before making love to his wife. Just as the handkerchief acts as the symbol of romantic deceit in Shakespeare's *Othello*, in Sax's celluloid text it is substituted by the golden robe, which is not merely a cherished gift to Othello but is also intimately connected with Othello and Dessie's sex life. Sax's film replaces the coveted handkerchief with the silk robe along with the paraphernalia of forensic testing by which Othello tries to ascertain Dessie's infidelity. Since "Elizabethan handkerchiefs were large items" (Maguire 5), a robe is an apter modern counterpart. Desdemona's red-and-white handkerchief has been interpreted as a symbol of her purity, since "the blood-stained sheet used as proof of virginity was an understood cultural assumption at this [Elizabethan] time" (Boose 364). Sax's *Othello* transfers the symbolism onto the body of Othello himself, and the loss of his robe is equivalent to the loss of his intimate bodily identity tied to Dessie. As Othello's private life gradually deteriorates, he seems to undergo a psychological disintegration, manifested by his "Crack[ing] Up" on a national television show, which evinces the success of Jago's plot in ruining Othello politically.

As Dessie, Lulu (Emilia), and Jago go out for a dinner with Othello, the latter regales them by recounting his history—a slave narrative about the "blacks waiting on whites, just like they did in the old days on the plantations…" and mentions how after arriving in England, his people survived on "leftovers, other men's leavings" (*Othello* 73:19); Othello himself confesses with shame that in his youth he wanted to be white and not a "nigger"—which seems to be the psychological consequence of inhabiting a racially-prejudiced white supremacist society, where the desire of the black man to create his subjectivity is premised on the negation of his racial identity. Othello's sudden evocation of the terrible conditions of his people under the menace of colonialism seems to hint at the fact that he, in fact, is seemingly seeking a historical justification behind the collapse of his marriage to a white woman. After the showdown at the restaurant, where an outraged Othello tries to physically assault his supposed rival, Cassio, and is calmed down by a hypocritical Jago who hugs and kisses him—an evident gesture of homoeroticism—Othello assaults Dessie to the coarse tune of "tell me the truth, bitch" (*Othello* 77:33). Violence becomes a racial identifier as, after a terrified Dessie storms out of their apartment, a paranoid Othello is seen rummaging her workstation and sniffing their marital bed like a wild animal, while searching for the evidences of his wife's supposed adultery. Then, almost betraying the traits of a petty criminal, Othello is found thuggishly assaulting Cass, who is also his colleague at the Met., in the dark confines of a parking lot. According to Cartelli and Rowe, "discernible to us [the audience] by the whites of his eyes and by a trick of the camera that thickens his lips, John looks like a stalker waiting in ambush to attack his unsuspecting (stereotypically white) victim" (136).

The depiction of Othello here seems to be in accordance with the stereotypes perpetuated by the white supremacist society: that of a savagely violent black man who posits a threat to both the white man and the white woman. This tallies with the way the poster of Sax's *Othello* is designed, with the images of white Dessie and Jago in the foreground, while Othello's black face in the background seemingly evokes the idea of a dangerous savage lurking in the dark. Coming to power in the aftermath of Coates' murder, Othello announces his anti-racist policy at a conference as "zero tolerance for racism... [and] misconduct" (*Othello* 24:49), and even privately states to Jago: "If they think it's all right to beat a person to death, they don't belong to the Met: they belong to prison because they're violent animals" (*Othello* 24:13). But when such a rational and ethically upright person is found violently assaulting his wife and her suspected paramour, it seems to reiterate the racially-prejudiced notion of the black man lapsing into violence and primitivism under pressure, as nature always prevails over culture. Although at the beginning Othello

warns the black rioters against behaving like "ignorant fools" (*Othello* 9:33) and adhering to the stereotype of the ill-informed and violent black man, Othello himself seems to do so. Later when he learns about her innocence and Jago's vindictive motives behind manipulating him, Othello is seen aggressively lunging towards Jago, but failing to hit him, as the latter takes his hand in a gesture of evident homoeroticism after claiming that he still loves Othello dearly. At this Othello spares Jago, and instead commits suicide himself.

Unlike in Shakespeare's *Othello* where Desdemona dies with a charitable lie exempting Othello from the charges of spousal murder, in Sax's film there are deliberate alterations in this sequence: even when Dessie recuperates after the initial murderous assault, Othello smothers her once again, once and for all, probably hinting that, unlike her Elizabethan counterpart, Dessie would never let her murderous husband get away with impunity. This highlights the plight of the Elizabethan women who were expected to swear absolute loyalty to their husbands under all circumstances—exemplified not only by Desdemona but also by Emilia, the maltreated but obedient wife of Iago. However, in the post-Feminism world of Sax's film, women are seen as not only economically independent (Dessie is a freelance writer), but also socially emancipated, as is indicated by the absence of the figure of Brabantio in the film. The figure of Lulu, Dessie's confidante, emerges as a palimpsest of the Shakespearean characters of Bianca and Emilia, thus subverting the angel/whore dichotomy, evincing how British women in the twenty-first century enjoy greater autonomy over their bodies and sexuality than their Elizabethan counterparts.

Sax's London-based film ending in Jago's triumph—subverting Shakespeare's plot in his own city—appears to emerge as a powerful exposition of the continued persistence of racism and its success within the scaffoldings of modernity. After Othello's suicide, the British authorities promote Jago to the coveted position of the Commissioner of Police in order to place the charge in "safer" hands. This radically altered ending emblematizes a bid to expose the vicious cycle of racism that persists in contemporary society behind the veneer of political liberalism. The film ending with Jago's insistence—"Don't talk to me about race. Don't talk to me about politics. It was love…" (*Othello* 76:39)—highlights the social protocol of maintaining silence about racism, which then perpetuates itself in covert ways. The John Othello-Ben Jago bond can explicate new ways of interpreting the Othello-Iago liaison in Shakespeare. In the play text, Iago alleges in one of his soliloquies: "I hate the Moore, / And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets / He has done my Office" (Shakespeare 1.3.385-87). Stanley Edgar Hyman in *Iago: Some Approaches to the Illusion of His Motivation* (1970) argues that Iago's remarks from a "psychoanalytic perspective... reflect the unconscious wish that Othello [should] go to bed with him, disguised by projection as the possibility that Othello has gone to bed with Emilia, and further defended against by being made rumour rather than his own idea" (52-53). Iago's "peculiar end" (Shakespeare 1.1.60) has been thought to include complex and aberrant (therefore "peculiar") motives by many critics. Ben Saunders points out the "compulsive anality" (154) in Iago's character, in which racial hatred is imbricated with unnatural, anal (homosexual as well as excremental) desire. Saunders identifies "the racist association of 'blackness' with excrement" as "part of the deep rhetorical structure" (173) of Shakespeare's *Othello.*

Sax's film helps to drive home the fact that *Othello* is not about race but about racism. Be it the African Moor in early modern Venice or the black Londoner of post-colonial contemporary England, the cultural 'other' in both societies will have similar negative racial attributes imposed upon them (violent, lascivious, apish) by the racially-prejudiced society and will encounter similar impediments in trying to assimilate into the mainstream. The production illustrates how the prevalent socio-political concerns of current British urban society can establish a dialogue with Elizabethan ones, and in the process facilitate an altered understanding of both the early modern past and the post-modern present.

***O* (2001) by Tim Blake Nelson**

Fernando Ortiz, in mapping out a space of sustained cross-cultural encounters and transition which would necessitate his neologism, observed: "The concept of transculturation is fundamental and indispensable for an understanding of the history of Cuba, and, for analogous reasons, of that of America in general" (103). Although he makes this statement about the American continent, it would be equally applicable to the United States of America as a unique socio-cultural entity. Its history being one of the subjection of indigenous and African-origin populations by white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, its receptions and refashionings of an English play by the Anglo-Saxon cultural icon Shakespeare, dealing with racial economy and antagonism, are always already informed by a particular tension of disavowal and resonance. Hollywood has produced adaptations of Shakespeare's *Othello* since the inception of its "golden age" (late 1920s), and they have always been contentious owing to their treatment of Othello's otherness. The dilemma of whether to stress this cultural otherness of Othello or to gloss over it was expressed by Deborah Cartmell in the question: "What is worse: a white or a black representation of a racial stereotype?" (144-5).

Tim Blake Nelson's *O* (2001), a loose adaptation of the play into the genre of high school romance-tragedy, opts for the latter—with sustained use of African-American dialect and other references to the so-called American black culture. It exemplifies not only an espousal of a Shakespearean plot to understand and comment upon contemporary events involving violent interracial exchanges, but also reinscribes that plot with interpretive interventions which make sense only in a particular history of cultural evolution. Adapting *Othello* as a high-school tragedy, the film's production was both impelled and impeded by the Columbine massacre and other high school shootings, which redefined the violent possibilities of the campus romance genre at the turn of the twenty-first century (Semenza 100); it directly comments upon the escalation of precisely such incidents among students. The plot revolves around the relationship between star teen basketball player Odin James (Othello), nicknamed "O" by his teammates, and Desi (Desdemona), the daughter of the school's Dean, a relationship which is poisoned by Hugo (Iago), a member of the team and the son of its coach. The initials of Odin's name recall the sensational O.J. Simpson murder case, involving a famous black American football player murdering his white ex-wife.

The poster itself speaks volumes: we find Odin (played by Mekhi Phifer) wearing a jersey which stresses his physique and holding the sign "O" like a basketball or trophy above his head, posing him at the bottom center. He is isolated and the image fixes him as a black athlete rising above his origin. While Odin is at the bottom, the faces of Desi (Julia Stiles) and Hugo (Josh Hartnett) are above him, which is comparable with the contiguity of Dessie and Jago in Sax's *Othello* and enhances the poster's generational appeal to white spectators (Hodgdon 100). One implication of the poster is that Odin is metaphorically leaping above his social position to aspire to the domain of privileged whites, standing for the loop where he seeks to put the basketball-shaped "O." Odin's stance, facial expression and texture also distinctly recall the metanarrative of the American slave, which underlies the entire racial discourse of the film. The poster has a tangential connection to the history of the O. J. Simpson case, recalling the doctored *Time* magazine cover (June 27, 1994) featuring a blacked-up mug shot of Simpson with the headline banner "An American Tragedy" that appeared as the story broke. Both the film and its poster-image circulate traces of the Simpson story, and of "the space it continues to occupy in the American cultural imaginary" (Hodgdon 100). The letter "O" can be called the *starlet letter* in the film—to allude to the corrosive centrality of the letter "A" in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)—a privileged floating signifier encompassing a complex web of cultural referents. Apart from standing for the starlet Odin, it is the alpha and omega of the name "Othello," and makes the O.J. Simpson incident a more thinly-veiled intertext. The laconic polysemy of the film's title stresses an uncanny cultural parallel—a Shakespearean tragedy is reinvoked to explicate "an American tragedy." In the process, the hackneyed "primordial themes" circulated by the

original *Othello* become the stuff of populist tagline: the words "Trust. Seduction. Betrayal" (Nelson, *O*) appear in the poster. The Early Modern and the post-modern are inscribed as in a palimpsest, but in both "O" stands also for 'Other' (Taylor 276).

The film opens with the Ave Maria of Verdi's opera *Otello* playing to a blurred shot of white doves which gradually come into focus. A voiceover, later to be revealed as Hugo's, utters the lines: "All my life, I always wanted to fly. I always wanted to live like a hawk" (*O* 1:17). Like the LWT adaptation, this film too is implied to be from Iago's (Hugo's) perspective. His motive for undermining Odin's relationship and career is a frustrated desire for the acclaim and love of his father, the team's coach, who is named Duke, recalling Shakespeare's Duke of Venice. However, the above voiceover indicates an idealistic fascination for glory, for a 'high,' that is absent in the original Iago. Indeed, the hawk/dove binary with which the film begins clearly identifies the single soaring hawk, the basketball team's mascot, with Odin, the only black in an otherwise all-white school. This "ironic reversal of predator and prey—even social predator (the white man) and prey (the black man)" (Criniti 120) could be a commentary on deceptive social representations of black masculinity, where they are projected as predators. Hugo apparently fetishizes the popular image of Odin as the black hero who soars above others to score goals, as suggested by him looking on as Odin is hoisted in the air after they win a match. The hawk's and Odin's presence are filtered through rap music—a radical shift from Verdi's Ave Maria; rap, throughout the film, not only makes a voice that is not 'white' but also adds a racialized layer that the film plays out. Several times, such as during the success party, basketball games and even sexual intimacy between Odin and Dessie, this "black beat" (Bollig 159) signifies black aggressiveness and 'black pride'—a post-Civil Rights concept. This insight that Hugo's jealousy can stem from a composite fascination for Odin's on-court prowess of which his blackness forms an integral part, is possible only in the American context of white adolescent fascination for African-American "gangsta" music (hooks n.p.), but it leads us to ask whether a similar complex could have impelled Iago. If we remember that black bodies were frequently eroticized in Elizabethan England, we may appreciate how Shakespeare's transculturation into this American film impacts our reading of its original.

Nelson took pains to stress the American identity of the crises represented: the red, white and blue of the poster "are intended to underscore the nationalism of this *Othello*" (E. Brown 75), and the American flag features in the background of a shot of Odin and Desi together. Nelson, who intends to explore an American culture increasingly self-aware of its susceptibility to violence in the wake of school shootings in Jonesboro, Pearl, Eugene, Springfield and Edinboro (Hodgdon 100), seeks "to say that this was an American version of Shakespeare's tragic tale, and that right now in the United States... the high school is not only a credible place to tell the story but the most appropriate one, as well" (qtd. in E. Brown 75). The plaintive iconography of the letter "O," even as it encapsulates this tragic American context, also ties in with Othello's lamentation: "O, O, O!" (Shakespeare 5.2.199). The nexus between sex and violence in the film suggests the bullet hole and the female genital orifice as other connotations of the letter. Stephen Greenblatt has commented upon "the big, open Os that are sounded so hauntingly throughout the play" (54), not least in the Italian names of the protagonists. The same dynamics of the letter "O" is pervasive in the film, such as when Desi and Odin make love in a motel named The Willow (Will-O—a very Shakespearean innuendo), Desi repeating the sound as copulatory moaning. Thanatic implications of Desdemona's "Willow song" are coded into the rap lyric: "Even the sun goes down. Heroes eventually die" (*O* 43:50). All this transculturates certain subterranean discourses in Shakespeare's play and encourages us to read it in the light of Patricia Parker's findings that the letter "O" stood for the genital "nothing" in Shakespeare's time (E. Brown 77).

Hugo's plotting and dialogues reveal an ingrained objectification of both women and the black man, albeit in different ways. When Odin calls up Michael (Cassio) to share the MVP prize with him, saying "It's

for you baby" (*O* 06:34), Hugo feels jealous and betrayed, and frames a story where Michael shares Odin's girlfriend as well. This portrayal of a shared perception of the woman as prize is repeated when Hugo tells an intoxicated Odin: "She's not some gold medal you need to win! You're the fucking medal, man!" Odin tearfully replies: "From the first time I saw her, the only reason I ever wanted to do something big was so she'd be proud to stand next to me" (*O* 58:25). The approval of the other race (couched in the metaphor of the other sex) is the goal of his actions. Earlier, Hugo employs a peculiar strategy to make Odin suspicious:

> HUGO: You grew up in the hood, and you've seen plenty of hustlers, but the one thing I do know better than you is white girls, man. And white girls are snaky. All right, they're horny snakes. (*O* 36:30)

Hugo implicates the subculture of crime and prostitution ("hustlers") in black ghettos with the general character of "white girls" of his own community. He strategically denigrates the generalized gendered 'other' within his race to appeal to the racial 'other,' Odin. While this mirrors Iago calumniating Venetian women, Hugo's attitude to Odin is a far cry from Iago's unscrupulous racist hatred. Rather, the film appears to transculturate the idea of racism to read it as being based on a reifying fantasy, again privileging a tendency which is only latent in Shakespeare. According to Barbara Hodgson:

> *O*—or at least its characters—seem to desire to "be" black. Just as Hugo's initial voice-over reveals his obsession with wanting to fly like a hawk—that is, to be like O—blackness is something that Desi (her name a short-hand for desiring subject—or object) shares Hugo's wish for blackness or, perhaps more simply, she does not want to be O's "other."... Desi's "I want you to have me however you want" not only suggests that sexuality—and its transgressive potential—are wedded to blackness but figures her desire to be "made black" by consuming O's body language. (102)

This is all the more symptomatic because all black characters fit into the mainstream racial stereotype: Odin is a sports hero who has a history of drug abuse and relies on violence for settling grievances. Hugo buys steroid shots from a black pharmacist to enhance performance before matches, underlining a complex relation between whites and blacks in the drug cartel. Customers like Hugo drive the business, and the black subculture of drugs is motivated as well as interpreted largely by white customers, who then disseminate their own reading of it. Iago being the time-tested purveyor of racist stereotypes, Hugo's part in constructing this narrative is apt. The fits of anger natural to Othello are drug-induced in Odin (Aldama 205). This warped racial economy is aptly diagnosed in bell hooks's attack on the perception of antisocial "gangsta rap" as authentic black culture:

> The sexist, misogynist, patriarchal ways of thinking and behaving that are glorified in gangsta rap are a reflection of the prevailing values in our society, values created and sustained by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. In reality [black misogyny is] part of a sexist continuum, necessary for the maintenance of patriarchal social order... It is useful to think of misogyny as a field that must be labored in and maintained both to sustain patriarchy but also to serve as an ideological anti-feminist backlash. And what better group to labor on this "plantation" than young black men. (n.p.)

This passage relates not only to *O*'s racialized soundtrack, but also addresses a vexed question in *Othello* criticism. As Mark Breitenberg argues, "sexual jealousy is both constitutive and symptomatic of the normative operations of early modern patriarchy rather than an aberration" (175), but Shakespeare chooses to enact it onstage through an aberrant Moor. This social heterology foisted upon the racial 'other' is condemned by hooks as epistemic slavery—a critique applicable to *Othello* only through a transcultural reading taking place after the entire American slave saga. In the film, the stigma attached to the word

"nigger" is explored at length; Odin decides to kill Desi and Michael after being told they call him by that name. Earlier, Odin and Desi banter about a scar on his back, recalling the whiplash mark on former slaves. In retrospect, remembering that Othello was indeed "sold to slavery" (1.3.138), we locate another tangential event which has later found an escalated cultural significance.

Such an ideological, metonymic slavery can account for Othello's internalization of white Venetian ideology, and for the fact that he is possibly an erstwhile Muslim converted to Christianity and employed by the Christian state to subdue other Muslims, i.e., the Turks. Similarly, Odin helps his otherwise all-white team to win a crucial match against an all-black team called the Bulldogs of North Charleston ("Bulldogs" being possibly a racist shorthand for negroid features). The supporters of Odin's team are predominantly white, and those of the Bulldogs entirely black; Odin is symbolically subjugating his own community in favor of whites. The sports arena is the cardinal domain of violence in the film. Coach Duke Goulding, Hugo's father, is at once adored by everybody and passionately violent. It is he who alienates Hugo, and practically produces the phenomenon of Odin James by training and constantly directing the play. Like the Duke in Othello, he gives Odin the responsibility to score. During a break in the match against the Bulldogs, he says: "And Odin, if he [the opposing scorer] gets away from Billy, I don't give a shit if you have to pull his pisser, his feet do not leave the ground!" (*O* 32:20). The playing arena being a field of masculinity and valor, his dependence on Odin to perform violent and illegal physical confrontation is symbolic. Thus, *O* repeatedly brings out the social division of labor which not only structurally overdetermines black behavior as violent, but also creates fractures within the white society and family. Roger (Roderigo) is bullied by others as a "fucking faggot" (*O* 56:54), and no one except Hugo befriends him. This leads to him killing Michael on Hugo's instructions.

One of the most cinematically significant features of both Sax's *Othello* and Nelson's *O* is the way they transculturate the psychoanalytic points about *Othello* which twentieth century criticism unearthed. They both underscore the psychological doubling between the Othello and Iago characters, portraying them as alter-egos by emphasizing the "love" that Jago and Hugo feel for Othello and Odin, respectively. The foregrounding of the Othello-Iago relationship and Iago's role as the audience's confidant develops an interpretive tradition began by Coleridge's influential reading of the play in his 1822 Table Talk:

> Jealousy does not strike me as the point in [Othello's] passion... It was the struggle *not* to love [Desdemona]. It was a moral indignation and regret that virtue should so fall: 'But yet the pity of it, Iago!—O Iago! the pity of it, Iago!'... Iago's" suggestions, you see, are quite new to him; they do not correspond with anything of a like nature previously in his mind." (*Coleridge's Writings* 176-7)

Othello's tragedy is therefore premised upon the loss of an ideal (self-)image to Iago, rather than upon his own jealousy. This point is transculturated in the films through the avant-garde device of Iago's breaking the fourth wall to address the audience, which transforms Iago into a much more appealing and complex character than he is in Shakespeare's play.

Indeed, Hugo's alienation, unlike Iago's "motiveless malignity" (Coleridge, "Lectures" 250), makes him bond with socio-racial 'others' like Odin and loners like Roger. He is a complex character—a mouthpiece of the operational dynamics of the socio-cultural phenomena that this adaptation addresses and constitutes. For instance, in a literature class where we hear *Macbeth* being taught (alluding to the many textual parallels between *Othello* and *Macbeth*), the following exchange occurs:

> TEACHER: Mr. Goulding, Mr. James, would either of you care to name one of Shakespeare's poems for me?
> HUGO: I thought he wrote movies. (*O* 47:14)

This sarcastic commentary upon the prevalence of Shakespeare on screen in the 1990s calls for a transcultural reassessment of the Bard as a producer of popular culture. Hugo's paradoxical *white* "double self" (Du Bois 5) incites self-reflexivity in the white audience and is one of the instances of the noir trope of doubling in the film. For instance, just before the climax there is a low angle shot of him and Odin at the spiral staircase beneath the recurring roof where the white doves had been shown. The camera slowly dolly-zooms towards the roof to the voiceover:

> HUGO: You've been everything to me, O. To me, you're not my friend, you're my brother. And when a brother is wronged, so am I. I'm you, O. I'm a part of you. (*O* 69:25)

Such a statement can be read as invoking the doppelgänger trope and applying it to the racial situation. Earlier in the sex scene Odin looks into the mirror and sees Michael looking back: "Not only does the mirror shot image a fantasized homoerotic relation that suggests a floating sexuality, it also momentarily turns O into a white boy, a threat to his identity that he plays out in anger, despite her telling him to stop, on Desi's body" (Hodgdon 103).

This same ambivalent nexus between the noir trope, interracial mirroring and homoeroticism is expressed in Hugo's statement above. This not only builds upon implicit homoeroticism in Iago's description of Cassio's dream to Othello (Shakespeare 3.3.475-483) and in Iago's general motivation (Little 317), but acknowledges the black body as "part of" white existence and vice versa. As Duke tells Hugo about Odin, "If he's got a problem, we've got a problem" (*O* 53:55).

Odin works as a representative of white ideology by winning matches. On the other hand, his violent activities not only weaken his own racial resistance, but also strengthen white racial legitimacy. His final monologue undoes this by incriminating Hugo: symptomatically, the star player complains of having "got played" by "this white prep-school motherfucker." Odin's unequivocal import is that "where I come from didn't make me do this" (*O* 85:28). The film discounts Michael's remark that "the ghetto just popped out of him (*O* 67:07). A recurring motif signifies Deep South culture (and by implication racial tension): the Spanish moss (Baker 51). The color scheme catenates the green moss, the green band Odin puts around Desi's finger and the green walls of Hugo's room with "jealousy... the green-eyed monster" in Shakespeare's *Othello* (3.3.170-1). No better instance can be found of how an expression deriving from the medieval humoral theory (regarding the green color of bile) can be transculturated and read racially in conjunction to a totally different cultural iconography.

The interaction between the categories of gender and race is also aporetic in the film. Emily's distrust of Odin is more visible than Emilia's in Shakespeare's *Othello*; the following dialogue after Odin's "hate-fuck" (Taubin n.p.) is representative:

> EMILY: What do you mean, rough? He forced you?
> DESI: No, it wasn't like that. We were already doing it.
> EMILY: Did you say "stop"?
> DESI: He didn't rape me... (*O* 47:35)

This encapsulates the whites' ambivalent problem with black violence. Taking it out of the sexual context, the power economy between the two races can be seen as already "doing it" together—constructing an infrastructure of eroticized black frustration and violent cultural expressions like misogynist rap and sexual deviance. Then when it spirals out of control, the black person is criminalized. This, of course, does not apply directly, but only metaphorically, to the interaction between an individual white woman and a black man. Desi rebukes Odin, unlike Desdemona, and speaks no pleading palliatives before her death. Indeed,

the fact that both Odin and Hugo kill their girlfriends appears, even more than in Shakespeare, to bespeak a need to silence the dissident and disobedient female voice.

Hugo's last words to Odin—"You won't ask me nothing. I did what I did. That's all you need to know" (*O* 84:17)—are taken directly from *Othello*, but culturally resonate as the high-handed attitude mirroring that of the descendants of white slave owners towards those of black slaves: a violence and a lack of answers perpetuated through generations. The final monologue is reserved for Hugo, who returns to his metaphor that "Odin is a hawk" (*O* 88:19). As he is taken away in a police car, asserting in voiceover that "I'm gonna fly too" (*O* 88:53), the bunches of Spanish moss appear white, flying against the black night. The end comes up with no answer, but with a grim culturally-coded imagistic reminder of perpetuating racial bipolarity—a suffocating enclosure rather than a closure.

Conclusions

What is appreciable in both adaptations of *Othello* discussed above is an adherence to the established semiotic conventions of Western cinema, operating in tandem with contexts, connotative allusions to contemporary events, and material signs peculiar to the local and particular conditions of production of each film. There are significant parallels between their portrayals of race relations: both Odin James and John Othello are descended from erstwhile American or Caribbean slaves, and have a neurotic complex about this ancestry vis-à-via their relationships with white people. That the Early Modern category of "Moor" is adapted in most millennial productions in terms of intercontinental slavery is symptomatic of the impact of this American experience in all later assessments of the race problematic, however specific or localized. The violence and hybridity associated with it has made it a template for the transculturation of race in general and *Othello* in particular. As regards the global marketing of Shakespeare's racial tragedy through the celluloid medium, it is useful to invoke the concept of "glocalization" popularized by Roland Robertson, which identifies "the simultaneity—the co-presence—of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies" (218) in the operation of global markets. A corporate film studio like ITV works within a televisual tradition substantially influenced by Hollywood, the American behemoth, but customizes its adaptation of Shakespeare for a targeted national audience by infusing it with references to contemporary racial politics and violence. The same applies to Hollywood productions per se, like *O.* Such a bivalence between "glocalization" and the retention of Hollywood as the "discursive center" in post-popular Shakespeare adaptations has led Richard Burt to coin the term "glo-cali-zation":

> By "glo-cali-zation," I mean both the collapse of the local and the global into the "glocal" and the retention of "Cali" (or Hollywood) as the center of the film industry. Shakespeare film adaptations significantly blur if not fully deconstruct distinctions between local and global, original and copy, pure and hybrid, indigenous and foreign, high and low, authentic and inauthentic... (15)

The understanding of the "glocal" as assimilative has, however, been criticized by Peter Sloterdijk, who insists that "the meaning of 'local' lies in the re-emphasis of the asymmetrical with all its implications" (255). This suggests that transculturated versions of *Othello* produced through heterogeneous cultural systems will be mutually incompatible, will never *add up*. When once-universalized cultural capital finds a localized expression in the same Anglophone metropoles in a different time frame, all the variables of the original—including race, gender, class, politics, language and statehood—undergo transculturation to give rise to overall renditions which are all asymmetrical to one another, since each of them is based on different coordinates. This is what this article hopes to have illustrated through its analysis of two post-millennial Anglo-American adaptations of *Othello*.

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Integrating Legal, Feminist, and Cinematic Narratives: An Analysis of Film *Akaash Vani*

Abstract: The film *Akaash Vani* (2013) exhibits a significant shift in how domestic violence is depicted in Hindi cinema, moving away from honor-based moral judgments to a perspective centered on rights. This article demonstrates how the film challenges the prevalent honor culture in India, highlighting it as a barrier to achieving gender equality and violence-free households. This article employs Orit Kamir's "law and film" theory alongside a *mise-en-scène* approach to critically examine how the film portrays coercion and control within domestic spaces. The article argues that through its visual depiction of domestic violence, the film offers cultural representations that align with feminist and legal perspectives on the issue. The film repeatedly depicts Vani (the protagonist) tensed, weeping, alone at the edge of her bed, in the kitchen, or serving meals to her husband, framed in dim lighting and often in silence. This visual motif emphasizes her isolation and constrained autonomy, highlighting the coercive forces and control embedded within the marital relationship. These choices in composition and lighting create a somber, claustrophobic atmosphere that mirrors her emotional confinement.

Keywords: domestic violence, *mise-en-scène*, control and coercion, honor and dignity

> "'[A]ggrieved person' means any woman who is, or has been, in a domestic relationship with the respondent and who alleges to have been subjected to any act of domestic violence by the respondent." (Chapter 1, Section 2.a of the *PWDVA 2005*)

Introduction

The Indian law *The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 (PWDVA)* indeed defines domestic violence within a gendered framework, primarily identifying women as victims and men as perpetrators. This approach reflects the patriarchal structure of Indian society, where gender roles and power dynamics are skewed in favor of men, often leading to women's subordination. As such, the law views domestic violence as a manifestation of patriarchal control, coercion, and subjugation of women.

The act of violence in domestic spaces has been understood as an exercise of male power and dominance in radical feminist theories. Catharine MacKinnon, for example, argues that domestic violence is a product of gendered power relations that reflect broader social inequalities (184-83). *PWDVA* supports this notion by focusing on the protection of women as the "aggrieved persons," (in Chapter 1, Section 2.a of the *PWDVA*) implicitly positioning men as the likely perpetrators. This is in line with feminist jurisprudential theory, which emphasizes that domestic violence is a tool of patriarchal oppression, aiming to reinforce male dominance and control over women's autonomy (MacKinnon 184-83).

The law also reflects the insights of scholars like Judith Butler, who discuss how gender is performed and reiterated through social norms, reinforcing male authority within the private sphere (*Gender*

Trouble… - 1990, n.p.) victim-perpetrator model, which presupposes a gender binary, resonates with Butler's understanding of how gender violence is perpetuated through social roles and the performance of gendered power in intimate relationships. Critics like Michael P. Johnson, however, argue that while the law's gendered approach addresses the structural power imbalances, it may overlook cases of domestic violence that do not fit neatly into this victim-perpetrator model, such as violence within same-sex relationships or violence perpetrated by women against men (1127). Nonetheless, the framing of domestic violence in *PWDVA* aligns with mainstream feminist theories that regard such violence as a systemic outcome of patriarchal social arrangements.

PWDVA defines domestic violence in broad terms, encompassing physical, mental, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse, as outlined in Section 3 (a) and (b) of the Act. This comprehensive understanding aligns with Michael P. Johnson's concept of "intimate terrorism" (1127), which characterizes domestic violence as a pattern of coercive control that extends beyond isolated incidents of violence. This conceptualization is echoed in the *PWDVA*, where domestic violence is framed as coercive control rather than episodic or isolated abuse. Section 3 (b) of the *PWDVA*, which highlights the use of violence "with a view to coerce her," directly speaks to this notion of coercive control.

The legal language of the *PWDVA* cannot be easily reduced to a literal or linear interpretation, as it is the product of complex socio-cultural, historical, feminist, and legal narratives. Domestic violence is a deeply embedded issue that varies across temporal and spatial contexts, shaped by diverse social, cultural, and political factors. Understanding coercion as the core element of domestic violence requires more than a superficial interpretation; it calls for an in-depth exploration of the multiple layers of meaning that reflect changing societal views on gender, power, and violence. This article analyzes the cultural aspect of legal codifications of coercion and control by examining the film *Akaash Vani* (2013), directed by Luv Ranjan. Through its portrayal of coercion and control within domestic spaces, the film visually interprets the feminist and legal concepts, presenting viewers with cultural representations that resonate with feminist and legal perspectives discussed above.

This article discerns a significant transformation in the portrayal of domestic violence within the context of this particular Hindi film. In the Hindi films released (between 1996-2001) before the *PWDVA 2005* was promulgated, such as *Yaraana* (*Friendship*) (Dhawan 1995), *Daraar* (*Rift*) (Abbas and Mastan 1996), *Agni Sakshi* (*With Fire as Witness*) (Ghosh 1996), *Raja Ki Aayegi Baraat* (*The King's Entourage Will Arrive*) (Gaekwad 1997), *Mehndi* (*Henna*) (Khan 1998), *Daman: A Victim of Marital Violence* (*Subjugation: A Victim of Marital Violence*) (Lajmi 2001), and *Lajja* (*Shame*) (Santoshi 2001), violence in domestic realms was often depicted as isolated incidents attributed to either psychopathic husbands or dowry-related conflicts (Sharma and Tripathi, "Scripting Justice" 11). Contrary to these films, *Akaash Vani* signifies a noteworthy paradigm shift. Several other Hindi films have also explored the theme of domestic violence rooted in patriarchal control and coercion, such as *Provoked* (Mundhra 2007), *Heaven on Earth* (Mehta 2008), *7 Khoon Maaf* (*7 Murders Forgiven*) (Bhardwaj 2011), *Parched* (Yadav 2015), *Thappad* (*The Slap*) (Sinha 2020), *Bulbbul* (*Nightingale*) (Dutt 2020) and *Darlings* (Reen 2022). These films often highlight the abuse and torture inflicted on wives by their husbands and families within the domestic space. However, *Akaash Vani* stands out for its *mise-en-scène* of private spaces, which creates a palpable silence that reflects the elements of coercion and control. *Provoked* and *Heaven on Earth* are excluded from analysis because their settings are in foreign lands (UK and Canada). *7 Khoon Maaf* and *Parched* incorporate other themes beyond domestic violence, and therefore do not provide a concentrated narrative on this issue. *Thappad* focuses on microaggression (a slap) as a form of abuse (Sharma and Tripathi, "From Orthodoxy" 128), while *Darlings* centers on the Muslim marriage system, involving Muslim Personal Law, which would shift the focus of the article from Hindu honor culture. This article zeroes in on *Akaash Vani* for its in-depth narrative on sexual coercion and the psychological intimidation inherent in domestic violence, a subject

largely underexplored in India. The article highlights coercion and control as systematic and structural within domestic spaces, as depicted in the film. It thus examines the honor-based patriarchal system that upholds gender hierarchy through intimidation, coercion, suppression, and control.

Akaash Vani adopts a feminist perspective, reframing domestic violence as an outcome of entrenched male dominance ingrained within a patriarchal society that places considerable emphasis on notions of honor. According to Lynn Welchman and Sara Hossain, in their *'Honour': Crimes, Paradigms, and Violence Against Women* (2005), the honor society is "attributed to a social order claimed to require the preservation of a concept of 'honor' vested in male (family and/or conjugal) control over women and specifically women's sexual conduct: actual, suspected or potential" (4). The film portrays domestic violence as a type of violence rooted in notions of patriarchal honor. This is illustrated by scenes where parents coerce their daughter into marriage against her will, or in the scene in which the wife silently endures sexual and psychological abuse by her husband to preserve the family's honor. The portrayal emphasizes that these acts of violence are driven by the desire to maintain male dominance or patriarchal norms in the family and society.

Akaash Vani portrays the life of Vani (Nushrat Bharucha), who unwillingly accepts a hasty marriage with a man of her parent's choice to protect the honor of the family. The film explores the significant issue of arranged marriage as a coerced union and domestic violence against women, challenging traditional romantic ideals pertaining to the "big fat Bollywood wedding" (J. Kapur 221). Vani's journey highlights the pressure on women to conform to societal norms, regardless of their own happiness. She struggles to speak out about her relationship with Akaash (Kartik Aaryan) due to the fear of dishonoring her parents. The film underscores the deep-rooted belief that a woman's actions dictate her family's honor, leading to stringent control over her life. However, Vani's courage shines through when she stands up against violence and seeks a divorce from her abusive husband. Her decision to break free from the chains of honor-based violence sends a strong message of women's agency and autonomy, defying oppressive cultural expectations.

A new cinematic trend involves employing films to amplify the voices of oppressed women, enabling them to take a stand against coercive socio-cultural practices by articulating their rights. Sophia A. McClennen and Joseph R. Slaughter opine that during the 1990s the Human Rights movement gave literature and film a universal language for reconstructing morality, immorality, justice, and injustice (1). In addition to this, Michael Ignatieff suggests that Human Rights have become "the lingua franca of global moral thought" (320) through popular cultural media. Elizabeth S. Anker further claims that the language of Human Rights "worked to combat the oppression of women" (1). *Akaash Vani* visually and narratively portrays the impact of patriarchal honor-centric ideologies, depicting how they facilitate the infringement of women's rights within private settings. According to Pramod K. Nayar, this new cinematic language represents the popular crafting of legal narratives with cultural objectives, addressing instances of rights violations ("Human Rights and Literature" xi-xiii). Both Pramod K. Nayar and Lynn Hunt argue that the principles of Human Rights have extended beyond the domains of law and politics to influence various areas like the arts, literature, cinema, and other facets of mainstream culture (Nayar, "Postcolonial Affects" 4; Hunt 20-22). Ram Devineni, a documentary filmmaker observes that (sexual) violence against women in India is "not a legal issue; rather it was a cultural problem" (qtd. in Bhattacharjee et al. 621). Even in the context of domestic violence, the need for addressing the prevalence of coercion and control goes beyond legal actions, demanding cultural engagement. Films can serve as a potent tool in this regard, as Nayar argues that although they might not hold legal significance, they wield a strong emotional influence on the collective consciousness, capable of addressing cultural and moral deficiencies in society, thus contributing to the process of "the remaking of a civil society" ("Postcolonial Affects" 2).

The plot of *Akaash Vani* delves into the societal norms that justify honor-based social behavior, perpetuating women's subordination and objectification in marriage. It critiques the patriarchal family system that prioritizes male honor while normalizing female honor violations. Vani's struggle against societal expectations and her decision to seek divorce assert her individual rights. The film's plot effectively uses visuals and narrative to promote the right to autonomy and agency and challenge cultural norms that restrict women from attaining these rights. The film contributes to the growing cultural awareness surrounding domestic violence and women's rights in India. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing women as individuals, deserving of respect and acknowledgement for their contributions. Orit Kamir introduces the term "law films" ("Framed" 2) to describe films like *Akaash Vani* that incorporate legal themes, such as domestic violence, into their narratives, exploring cultural images of the legal concepts. She develops a feminist film theory for interpreting and analyzing such films, presenting the "law and film" theory ("Framed" xiii) to scrutinize gender-based violence through the lens of universal human rights, specifically focusing on human dignity. Kamir contends that dignity should be the central organizing principle for a gender-equitable socio-legal framework, drawing from the foundational principles of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948). She adopts a dignity-centric approach to addressing gender concerns like sexual harassment, rape, and domestic violence. In her analytical model, she underscores the importance of understanding honor culture as the underlying value system influencing both legal discourse and cinematic representation. Kamir asserts that recognizing, deciphering, and critiquing honor-based societal constructs, traditions, and behaviors can significantly bolster feminist efforts. Her film theory classifies law films into two categories: one that upholds hierarchical honor-based systems and another that advocates for equality that ensures dignity. Kamir's theory of dignitarian feminism effectively elucidates the concept of gender inequality while highlighting the vulnerabilities in honor-driven institutions. She illustrates the coexistence of competing social hierarchies rooted in honor and dignity ("Why 'Law-and-Film'" 262-65; "Honor and Dignity" 193-95). Social and legal systems built on honor uphold patriarchal structures, whereas systems founded on dignity have the potential to establish gender-equal social and legal frameworks. Honor-based values undermine individual agency, leading to vulnerabilities across social, political, economic, and physical dimensions. Consequently, within the framework of dignitarian feminism, honor is recognized as the central obstacle to achieving equitable regard for women (Kamir, "Cinematic Judgment" 29-31; Kamir, "A Dignitarian Feminist" 304).

This article examines the plot, narrative, and visuals of the film *Akaash Vani* to unravel the cultural images of coercion and control prevalent in honor societies. The honor codes that cast women as passive carriers of family honor also undermine their autonomy and personal choices. This article applies Kamir's theory of law and film to conduct a textual and discourse analysis of *Akaash Vani*. The aim is to critically examine the prevailing honor culture in India as depicted in the film, considering it a significant obstacle to achieving gender equality and creating violence-free domestic environments. It critiques the politics of honor that subject women to domestication, self-sacrifice, and submission—the qualities often celebrated as virtues of femininity in Indian cultural texts, including cinema. However, *Akaash Vani* exposes the darker side of these glorified ideals, depicting coercion, control, suppression, and abuse. The film's exploration of honor culture's detrimental impact on women, along with the presence of domestic violence, can be analyzed through the lens of the *mise-en-scène* of the setting and space along with the critical analysis of the narrative.

Cinematic Framing of Honor Codes and Domestic Violence

In *Akaash Vani*, Vani is placed at the heart of the plot and narrative, highlighting her journey as she is coerced into a gendered role through the lens of honor. Throughout the film, Vani becomes a witness to three distinct positions shaped by honor culture. First, she observes the immense family pressure that

forces her into marrying a man chosen by her parents, reflecting the societal expectations placed on women. Second, she experiences the coercive and controlling behavior of her husband, revealing the oppressive nature of marriage. Finally, she witnesses the contrasting figure of Akaash, whose romantic love offers her the only means to reclaim her self-respect, dignity, freedom, and liberty. Through these three positions, Vani's role as a witness underscores the impact of honor on her choices and well-being.

Akaash Vani portrays how a woman is compelled to abandon her autonomy, agency and freedom due to the honor-related expectations imposed by her family. She is forced into a marriage without her consent, discontinuing her education. Additionally, she silently endures mental and sexual abuse at the hands of her husband in order to safeguard her family's honor. During the first 40 minutes of the film, the story unfolds with Vani enjoying her carefree and joyful college days. She falls in love with Akaash, a fellow student, and they decide to be married. Vani wants to inform her parents about their relationship, however, she requests for some time to do so. Meanwhile, Vani discovers that her sister, Shivani, has eloped with someone. The film's script reveals that Shivani desired to marry a man of her choice, but her parents rejected him as he belonged to a different caste. The sequence develops from here to reflect that in patriarchal families within the Indian subcontinent, regardless of caste, regional, and religious identities, honor is considered the most treasured value (Vishwanath and Palakonda 386; Chakravarti 310). The honor of a family is gained or lost based on the behavior of women. Behaviors that align with religious principles are seen as upholding the purity and honor of the family, lineage, and caste, while actions deemed inappropriate are believed to tarnish it. The significance placed on family honor forms a fundamental aspect of the Indian social framework, as the family continues to wield considerable influence within the social structure (Vishwanath and Palakonda 386; Chakravarti 310).

Usually, in India, a marriage occurring between individuals belonging to different castes or religions can lead to severe consequences. Such a marital union is viewed as bringing dishonor not only to the immediate family but also to the entire kinship. When a girl expresses her desire to marry outside her caste, she is met with outrage and scrutiny from her relatives. The couple who transgresses these societal norms is perceived as acting selfishly, showing no regard for the honor of their family. Women's "disgraceful" actions within one's own kinship permanently tarnish the family's honor (Gupte 75; Chakravarti 386-87). The film makes Vani witness her parents' profound mental anguish as they endure the taunts and shame inflicted upon them by society repeatedly. One of the neighbors expresses concern about the potential difficulty in Vani's marriage after Shivani's "shameful act" (*Akaash Vani* 00:46:30). She taunts Vani's mother saying, "Never imagined it! Whenever I look at Vani, I worry, at the very least, she (Shivani) could have considered that there is another sister at home to be married" (*Akaash Vani* 00:45:12) (our translation).[31] Vani's father feels ridiculed when his friend tells him that Shivani was found in a mall with a friend a week ago. He criticizes the freedom given to a girl to roam around with a boy saying "These days, children's friendships are so very close that you can't even tell whether they are friends or something else" (*Akaash Vani* 00:46:05) (our translation).[32] Vani again finds one of the acquaintances condemning the elopement while talking to her mother and saying, "Parents raise their children with so much love and care, yet children never think even once how their one mistake can tarnish the family's reputation" (*Akaash Vani* 00:46:23) (our translation).[33] This social scrutiny and criticism emphasizes how societal concern arises when any individual violates its honor codes. Reflecting on this social scenario, Purna Sen explains that "Honor codes and crimes are not solely about individual men controlling the lives of

[31] Hindi original version: "Kabhi socha na tha! Mai jab bhi Vani ko dekhti hun yahi sochti hun, kam se kam ye to socha hota ki ghar me ek behan aur bhi hai"

[32] Hindi original version: "Ab ajkal ke baccho ki dosti bhi itni zyada hai ke pata hi nahi chalta ye friend hai ya…"

[33] Hindi original version: "Maa baap baccho ko kitne pyaar se paal posh ke bada karte hai lekin bacche ek baar bhi nahi sochte ki inki ek galti…"

individual women. They are about community norms, social policing and collective decisions and acts of punishment…" (48).

The film's imagery works in harmony with its narrative elements to vividly convey the protagonist Vani's sense of helplessness as she grapples with the societal honor codes that pressure her into compliance. By using a *mise-en-scène* approach, we see how visual composition, lighting, setting, and character positioning, all underscore the tension between Vani's personal desires and the rigid expectations imposed by her community.

The film starts with high-key lighting, characterized by bright light with minimal shadows, creating a cheerful and optimistic atmosphere. Extreme close-ups of Vani's smiling face, accompanied by pleasant music, emphasize her happiness. The combination of long shots of natural landscapes, bright lighting, and close-ups of her smile sets the tone for the freedom, autonomy, and liberty that Vani enjoys in this moment. In these portrait-framed scenes of Vani, both her time as a student and her relationship with Akaash are depicted as sources of light, happiness, love, and care in her life.

In contrast to the liberating atmosphere of her college campus, Vani's home environment with her parents is depicted as a space characterized by shadows and darkness, where her autonomy, agency, and ability to make personal choices—whether about her education or marriage—are consistently undermined. Her time spent at home is marked by an upset and unpleasant mood, filled with tense silences and a pervasive sense of unease. Vani appears constantly stressed and burdened, reflecting the stifling constraints placed upon her by her family's expectations and the lack of support for her individual aspirations.

Tolerating continuous taunts, ridicule and social judgments, Vani's parents are overwhelmed with grief and express regret over their family's tarnished honor due to Shivani's actions. Her father (Kiran Kumar) sobs badly and says, "Children shouldn't shred their parents' dignity in this manner… You tell me too. If you love someone" (*Akaash Vani* 00:49:30) (our translation).[34] The film highlights the key aspects of an honor-based family structure, where family honor transgressions are treated extremely seriously, while female honor violations are considered commonplace. Within these honor-centric societies, male members of the family are responsible for controlling women to protect the family's honor and reputation. This system assigns active guardianship of honor to males. At the same time, females are relegated to passive roles, treated as objects subject to the concept of "currency of honor and shame" (Kamir, "Dignitarian Feminist" 312), ultimately devalued for the benefit of the family and male members.

Vani's parents' constant worry and fear have a strong impact on her, making her feel more and more nervous and scared. As a result of this emotional turmoil, Vani refrains from disclosing her relationship with Akaash to her parents, disregarding his continuous efforts to persuade her otherwise. However, her parents, driven by the fear that Vani might defy the honor codes of the family and community, decide to hasten her marriage. They persistently persuade Vani, eventually leading her to surrender and consent to marrying according to their wishes and choices. In this sequence, the narrative draws the viewers' attention towards arranged marriages in India, which are often imposed upon women in the name of family and community honor. Scholars (Siddiqui 2-4; Gangoli et al., *Forced Marriage*… 22-34) have examined forced marriage as a manifestation of gender-based violence, which constitutes a violation of women's human rights. They try to argue that forced marriage can be categorized as domestic violence, a form of gender-based violence, or as part of the broader continuum of violence against women. According to official documents from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of Health, forced

[34] Hindi original version: "Baccho ko is tarah se maa baap ki izzat nahi ucchalni chahiye… Tu bhi bata de, kahi tu bhi kisi se…?"

marriage is acknowledged as a type of domestic violence and is seen as contributing to domestic violence occurring within the context of marriage (Gangoli et al., "Understanding Forced Marriage" 26-29).

Apart from her supportive friends in the college setting, and the controlling environment of her parental home, the third pivotal setting in the film is Vani's marital home. This space is defined by coercion, control, and isolation, emphasizing the limitations imposed on her freedom and mobility. Vani's movements are restricted almost exclusively to the bedroom, kitchen, and hall, underscoring the lack of agency and confinement she experiences in her husband's home. The atmosphere is depicted oppressive, with consistently low lighting and an unsettling silence that fills the space, further amplifying the emotional distance and tension between the spouses. Their interactions are marked by strained expressions and frequent moments of discomfort, portraying a deeply unhappy and stifling environment that contrasts sharply with the warmth and vitality of her college life.

Repeated images of Vani sitting alone at the edge of the bed, cooking, or serving dinner to her husband in a setting marked by loneliness, sadness, and dim lighting emphasize her isolation throughout the film. These scenes underscore how the cultural practice of arranged marriage in India reinforces women's subordinate social status, portraying them not as valued individuals but rather as burdens to their parents, later transferred to their husbands. The film uses this visual repetition to highlight how women are often seen not as assets but as liabilities within this societal framework. Vani's marriage is depicted as not being successful; instead, it illustrates it as manipulative and controlling, stemming from the inherent idea that the woman who enters the union is already regarded as secondary and burdensome. Her husband, Ravi (Sunny Singh) does not treat her equally and subjects her to sexual and psychological abuse. On their wedding night, Ravi makes sexual advances towards an unwilling Vani. The film portrays this sequence as an act of coercion, causing Vani immense distress and leading her to tears, which starkly contrasts with the conventional romantic portrayal of marital intimacy in Hindi cinema.

Subsequent depictions of their sexual encounters as marital couple throughout the film emphasize their non-consensual nature and lack of romance. Vani expresses her feelings of being controlled and despised by her husband in various aspects of her life. When explaining the extent of the mental torture and abuse she endures, she describes how he constantly misbehaves and creates a conflict over trivial matters:

> Vani: His constant torture. He misbehaves all the time. I can't stay with him.
> Vani's Mother: Did he hit you?
> Vani: No mother.
> Vani's Mother: Then?
> Vani: Fighting over small things. He has a problem with everything. It's not as if I don't try... but no matter what I do, it's like he is just fond of fighting. I feel suffocated being with him). (*Akaash Vani* 01:18:08) (our translation) [35]

However, her mother (Shubhangi Latkar), following a traditional mindset prevalent in Indian society, focuses solely on physical abuse as a measure of violence, disregarding its psychological and sexual aspects. When Vani responds with a "no" to her mother's inquiry about physical violence, her mother downplays the seriousness of the entire issue. Her father says, "Don't worry. We will talk to him. This keeps

[35] Hindi original version: "Vani: Har samay ka torture! Har waqt badtamizi. Mai nahi rah sakti uske saath / Vani's Mother: Unhone mara tumhe?/ Vani: Nahi maa/ Vani's Mother: Phir? / Vani: Har choti cheez pe jhagda. Har baat pe problem. Aur aisa bhi nahi ke mai try nahi karti. Par kuch bhi karu, usko shauk hai ladne ka. Mera dum ghootataa hai uske saath"

happening between couples. Everything will be alright" (*Akaash Vani* 01:18:33) (our translation).[36] This particular occasion depicts how parents and others exhibit an apathetic stance towards mental and sexual harassment by the husband, treating it as a commonplace and insignificant matter when it should actually be viewed as a serious concern. The film's storyline underscores that lack of concern towards domestic violence stems from the unequal position women often hold within their marital households.

Family honor is often linked to the family unit's achievements and the esteem it receives within society. Typically, male family members are commended for their roles as heads of the family or as primary earners (Agarwal 155), thus sharing in the recognition and respect associated with the family's honor. In contrast, women's contributions as caregivers are frequently downplayed, and viewed as inherent rather than deserving acknowledgement and rewards. Vani, in her state of helplessness, laments her secondary status and draws a comparison between herself and a domestic worker: "I am a domestic servant who cooks, washes clothes, cleans utensils" (our translation) [37] and "then get tired and have to wait for him till he uses me physically for his pleasure… and I don't even get paid for it" (*Akaash Vani* 01:23:58) (English original).[38] Vani expects acknowledgement and respect for her diligent domestic efforts; however, her diegetic responses mostly suggest her husband's disrespectful conduct towards her, characterized by rudeness, lack of respect, and a combination of coercion and manipulation. She realizes that her husband and parents dismiss her sense of self-respect and happiness. Their worries are centered on the opinions of others about them and their family while neglecting Vani's concerns. According to Mattias Iser, the lack of proper recognition relegates women to mere societal commodities, depriving them of independent existence (n.p.). They are reduced to instruments for achieving certain goals, and their feminine roles primarily serve to define and uphold notions of masculinity (Becker 27). This objectification is most prominently evident within the framework of marriage, where women are subjected to conditions that mainly perpetuate gender-based hierarchies within the family and uphold the stability of the marital relationship (Manuvel 23).

(Re) Defining Honor and Seeking Individual Agency

Vani critiques the patriarchal families' "most valuable symbolic possession… honor" (Kamir, "Applying Dignity" 5) which involves valuing family honor above personal self-respect and autonomy. The climactic scene portrays domestic violence as honor-based violence (HBV). Aisha K. Gill et al. and Michaela Rogers argue that HBV refers to violence and abuse directed towards women within the patriarchal family, community, and societal structures, intending to safeguard the "honor" of the family and/or community (Gill et al. 75; Rogers 229-30). At first, Vani adheres to this cultural norm, conforming to the principles of honor by abiding by her parent's choice of a spouse and enduring sexual abuse and psychological torture at the hands of her husband. When her friend (Fatima Sana Shaikh) encourages her "Why don't you just leave the bastard? Get a divorce, come here, study for MBA and just move on with your life" (*Akaash Vani* 01:24:12) (English original), Vani finds it unimaginable due to the cultural beliefs she has internalized. She fears that she will become the cause of another stigma as a divorced woman to her family's social image after her sister's elopement. She regretfully reminds her friend of what others would say, "One daughter ran away! One will get divorced!" (*Akaash Vani* 01:24:19) (our translation).[39] In the context of the Indian society, any form of opposition to domestic violence, including actions like divorce, is seen as a source of disgrace or dishonor for the family. Shame is considered a stain in a culture built around honor. The distinction between honor as a positive value and shame as a negative one holds different meanings for

[36] Hindi original version: "Tum chinta mat karo. Ham baat karenge. Ye sab to hota rahta hai. sab thik ho jayega"
[37] Hindi original version: "Mai ek maid hu. Jo ghar saaf karti hai, kapde dhoti hai, bartan maajti hai"
[38] In the film, the characters, including Vani, often use a blend of Hindi and English in their dialogues.
[39] Hindi original version: "Ek bhaag gayi! Ek ka divorce ho gaya!"

both men and women. This duality in societal norms is reflected in the narrative, which suggests that women should remain patient and find contentment in their family's happiness. Passed down through generations of women, this narrative becomes a societal duty. This focus on endurance also sustains a cycle of domestic violence, permitting husbands to mistreat their wives while expecting the wives to preserve 'family honor' by remaining silent. By prioritizing family honor over the rights of individual women, not only is gender equality undermined, but women are also left vulnerable to potential abuse from men. Nevertheless, as she comes to realize that adhering to the concept of honor would mean a lifelong commitment, demanding her compliance even at the cost of personal freedom, agency, and self-respect, she makes the decision to confront this notion.

In the final sequence, the protagonist (Vani) recognizes the secondary position of women within the framework of familial honor and adopts an alternative narrative based on agency and autonomy to challenge the patriarchal norms associated with honor. She refuses to accept her husband's violent behavior and vows not to allow him to let it go as normal. Vani calls the sexual coercion by her husband a violation of her individual honor. When Ravi says that his wife Vani is his "honor" and she is tarnishing that herself, she replies "Which honor are you talking about? Is it the same which you loot every night?" (*Akaash Vani* 02:11:26) (our translation).[40] In societies that value honor, heterosexual relationships between spouses are often portrayed as sacred, romantic, and socially acceptable. The possibility of sexual abuse in marriage is rarely acknowledged or challenged. The stereotypical cinematic depiction of the wedding night sequence symbolizes the husband's perceived entitlement to his wife's sexuality. This scene highlights the reality that the oppression and exploitation of wives within marriage extend beyond the denial of economic, social, and civil rights, encompassing strict control over their sexuality. Marriage not only requires a woman to relinquish her identity and security to her husband, but also demands that she forfeit her right to give or withhold consent to sexual relations (R. Kapur and Cossman 122; Pateman 184-85).

The majority of those in her vicinity assert that a husband's mistreatment of his wife is to be expected. However, she challenges the rationale behind perceiving it as normal. Defying the subordinate role imposed by marriage, she boldly chooses to pursue a divorce. Utilizing legal means, she takes a stand against the abuses she has endured and strives to free herself from them. She confronts her parents when they again try to convince her to compromise for the sake of their social reputation. She says, "What are you afraid of Papa? What will people say?... If this mistake is yours, do you want me to compromise? …Do you want me to live with this mistake for a lifetime? (*Akaash Vani* 02:08:45) (our translation)[41]

The depiction of Vani as a confident and informed modern woman, who is well aware of her rights, challenges the traditional idealization of women in Hindi films as "the epitome of virtue and values" (Tere 2). She firmly asserts that the abuse violates her individual freedom and self-respect, and challenges the prevailing cultural narratives that normalize such acts. When her mother says, "Daughter, we have always cared for your well-being," (*Akaash Vani* 02:09:16) (our translation)[42] Vani resists: "False! It's all false! You are suggesting this just to safeguard your honor in society. I don't argue against parents having the right to choose a partner for their children. However, shouldn't parents also have the responsibility to ensure their children's happiness?" (*Akaash Vani* 02:09:20) (our translation).[43]

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[40] Hindi original version: "Kaisi Izzat? Wo izzat jise tum khud to har raat lootate hi ho…"

[41] Hindi original version: "Kis baat ka dar hai aapko? Ki log kya kahenge? ... Ye galti aapki hai to aap chahte ho mai samjhota karu. Kyuki ye galti aapne ki hai, aap chahte hai mai umra bhar ye galti jeeyun"

[42] Hindi original version: "Beta hamne hamesha tumhara bhala hi chaha hai"

[43] Hindi original version: "Jhoot! Sab Jhoot! Aap mere bhale ke liye nahi, is society me apni izzat banaye rakhne ke liye kah rahe hai. Mai nahi kahti ke parents ko apne baccho ka partner chunne ka haq nahi hona chahiye. Lekin phir kya unki responsibility nahi hai ke bacche khush hai ya nahi"

The film depicts gender inequality as the most common feature of societies that hold males accountable for family honor and respect, while females are held responsible for sexual purity and compliance (Gill and Brah 74). As a result, the purity and conformance of women as mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives is a certificate of masculine and familial honor. Males rely on women for their honor, and female dignity is diminished in honor of her husband and his family (Chakravarti 310). In the exterior world or larger society, men compete with other males for honor and respect, whereas in the conjugal area, they achieve respect and honor through familial authority (Kamir, "Honor and Dignity" 198). Vani condemns the gender-biased perspective that denies a woman the autonomy to make choices about her marriage. She challenges her father's insistence that her decision to divorce Ravi will tarnish the family's honor and presents her argument: "Today, I want to understand why, when a daughter tells her father that the boy he chose for her is not making her happy, she is encouraged to compromise. It is said that everything will be fine. But when a daughter admits her mistake to her father, she is mocked and made to suffer![44] (*Akaash Vani* 02:09:47) (our translation).[45]

The portrayal of Vani in the film acknowledges the increasing societal consciousness regarding domestic violence in India, as well as the changing role of films as "new sites for modernism" (Rajadhyaksha 37). This change in the cinematic landscape coincides with substantial socio-political and legal changes that have occurred over the past four decades, both domestically and internationally. These shifts encompass interconnected "transnational formations" (Rao 58) that influence and shape global culture through the "transnational circulation of ideologies" (Schaefer and Karan 701; Chowdhury 187-88). The impact of transnational elements on cinema led to a blended cinematic culture that incorporates both worldwide and regional aspects (Matusitz and Payano 69). This tendency not only gives rise to a contemporary "celluloid woman" like Vani, as mentioned by Nidhi Shendurnikar Tere (8) but also sets the film apart due to its inventive language utilization. It introduces a conversation focused on modern ideals and entitlements such as self-respect, agency, autonomy, integrity, and equality aiming to challenge the traditional patriarchal honor narratives. Subverting the prevalent culture of inequality and disrespect Vani rejects the honor culture imposed upon her: "If you are more concerned about what people will think of you than my happiness! If you want me to compromise with my life out of fear of this society, then no! I am not willing to live with the consequences of your mistake"[46] (*Akaash Vani* 02:10:53) (our translation).[47]

She leaves her home and family, and legally takes a divorce from Ravi. Through Vani's journey, the violence embedded in arranged marriages which are often imposed is highlighted. Finally, Vani's decision to break free from the chains of honor-based violence and seek divorce represents a powerful message of agency and autonomy for women in the face of oppressive cultural expectations.

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[44] "*Her* mistake" alludes to how daughters who opt for love marriages—against the traditional norms of arranged marriages—are often portrayed as having made *a mistake*. These women are frequently mocked or even ostracized by their families for exercising agency in choosing their life partners.

[45] Hindi original version: "Aaj mai aapse ye janna chahti hu ki kyu jab ek beti apne baap se kahti hai ke jo ladka unhone uske liye chuna wo uske saath khush nahi hai to use sikhaya jata hai ki samjhota karo. Aur wahi jab ek baap se ek beti kahti hai ke usse galti ho gai to uska majak bana ke usse jataya jata hai bhugto"

[46] "*Your* mistake" serves as a powerful moment of reversal in the narrative. Here, the protagonist challenges the conventional notion that only daughters err by choosing their partners in love marriages. Instead, she confronts the parents—particularly the father—highlighting that the societal expectation to conform to arranged marriages and the subsequent vilification of love marriages should not be normalized. Thus, it questions the infallibility often assigned to parental decisions in such matters.

[47] Hindi original version: "Agar aapko meri khusi se jyada parwaah is baat ki hai ke log aapke bare me kya sochenge, kya bolenge! Agar aap is society ke dar se chahte hai ke mai apni zindagi ke saath samjhota karu to nahi! Mai aapki galti jeene ko taiyar nahi."

Conclusions

In conclusion, the film *Akaash Vani* provides a poignant and thought-provoking exploration of the complex interplay between autonomy, integrity, self-respect, and patriarchal honor within the context of domestic violence. By presenting the contradictory values of individual dignity and societal honor mechanisms, the film compels audiences to confront the deeply entrenched gender norms perpetuating domestic violence, forced marriages, and the subjugation of women. Through the lens of familial honor, the film reveals the societal expectations on women to endure abuse in silence to protect the family's reputation and social image. However, the protagonist's journey from subjugation to self-realization serves as a powerful testimony to the resilience of the human spirit and the potential for change in even the most deeply ingrained cultural norms. Moreover, the film challenges the conventional understanding of honor by advocating for a holistic approach that upholds dignity while acknowledging and celebrating individual differences. The clarion call to liberate themselves from the vicious cycle of tolerance for violence sends a resounding message that women should no longer bear the burden of upholding family honor at the expense of their own well-being and self-worth. The narrative serves as a compelling cinematic critique of patriarchal honor and its ramifications on individual dignity and women's human rights. Its emotionally charged narrative calls for collective introspection and an urgent need to challenge age-old honor-based customs that allow violence and injustice to persist. By empowering women to reclaim their agency and promoting a culture of mutual respect, this film recommends an alternative of replacing honor with dignity.

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